

i wanna win the rat race nevermind second (the love that i got is forever my weapon)

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by [ElurosAthena](#)

Summary

In which the mobs of the server decide that Tommy's treatment during exile is unacceptable and thus they intervene.

(aka the animals take one look and at Tommy and go: it's free real estate)

Notes

This is set during exile, after the suicide attempt in the Nether, but before the failed party.

Title is from Heatseekers by Dreamers ft. Grandson

Italics are to show the use of non-human tongues (i.e. Ender and Animal Speech)

thelordofshrimp is all the hype squad a person could ask for so go you

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

Ranboo stared down at the sleeping form of his friend, troubled by what exile had done to the vivacious blond. He had seen how Tommy had changed in exile and it wasn't for the better. The blond had lost weight and quieted down, flinching away from Ranboo whenever the hybrid moved too fast. It made his heart ache.

A low warble came from behind him, prompting Ranboo to turn around and spy the enderman behind him. They tilted their head, looking at Ranboo with an almost parental air to them.

"What is troubling you, youngling?"

Ranboo cleared his throat, returning his attention to the blond sleeping in front of him. *"My friend, elder, the humans have hurt them and they are no longer themselves. I'm worried that something will happen to them and they won't be around any longer."*

The enderman made a comforting rumble in response before teleporting to stand at Ranboo's side. *"Which human is hurt and which is doing the hurting, youngling?"*

Ranboo frowned to himself as he thought about it. Common names did not translate well into Ender, with his own coming out as *split-black-white*. It took him a moment to properly translate their identities into Ender for the elder. *"My friend is red-loud-gold and the one hurting them is mask-smile-green."*

The elder Enderman tensed at the mention of Tommy, which alarmed Ranboo enough that he took a small step to the side. The enderman turned to look at him and chirped at him to show he meant no harm.

"My apologies, youngling, for losing my temper. The concept of harm coming to a youngling is upsetting enough to me, but when the only one wishing to intervene and help the hurt youngling is another youngling, I find that to be beyond the pale."

Ranboo took a slow breath before letting himself relax. *"Apology accepted, elder. I can understand your anger, as I too am enraged by the situation. Neither their pack nor their End have made any attempt to intercede on their behalf to protect them."*

This information only served to anger the enderman even more, with their eyes flaring an even deeper purple and their jaw opening all the way, as though they were aggroed on Dream

just from hearing about his actions. The mental image of Dream getting hunted by an enderman for no reason that he can figure out gave Ranboo a quiet sense of satisfaction.

"What sort of humans can just abandon a youngling like that? No youngling should worry about being left behind by their elders. And even if they were left behind by their original elders, a youngling should be taken in by other elders, not left in the hands of a monster."

A confused warble escaped Ranboo's mouth, but the elder was not done with their rant.

"Any elder who hurts a youngling is no longer an elder and should be removed from access to younglings."

The other's words only heightened Ranboo's distress about the situation. *"Then I've also failed red-loud-gold by leaving my friend with the monster."*

Shaking their head, the enderman offered comfort to the upset hybrid. *"You too are a youngling and thus are not responsible to fulfil the duties expected of an elder, for you are not yet one."*

"But then what should I do? I can't just sit to the side while the monster destroys my friend forever."

The enderman at his elbow bent forward slightly in order to get a closer look at Tommy before straightening up and nodding slowly. Ranboo shifted when he noticed that the other enderman did not offer anything up. Noticing his impatience, the enderman rumbled out a laugh.

"Have no fear, youngling. If this one's elders have failed them, I will step in to intervene myself."

Ranboo breathed a sigh of relief at the promise from the other before freezing in confusion. After all, how was a singular enderman meant to protect Tommy against the strongest human on the server? Sadly, before he could demand answers from the elder, the enderman teleported away.

The conversation with the enderman had done nothing to address his concern so Ranboo returned his focus to puzzling out how to help Tommy. It soon faded from his mind and was quickly forgotten.

However, Ranboo had no idea what he had set in motion, nor the consequences his words would bring the server.

Much later, after the youngling had returned to his settlement, the elder, *protector-bush-strong-defender*, found themselves on the beach again looking upon the human youngling, this time joined by other enderman elders as they pondered the problem set before them.

It only took a moment for the youngest of the elders to recognize the youngling sleeping in front of them. *"That is the human that is favored by the animals. They speak fondly of the*

golden one. I'm sure that they will provide assistance to our problems."

Another elder, *hunter-mooshroom-cynic-thinker*, chirped his displeasure. *"How much help can they really offer us? They shook their head at that before their gaze returned to the youngling shivering before them. "The first problem is removing the youngling from the care of the monster. Then we can worry about destroying the monster."*

The youngest elder of the group, *resident-spruce-quiet-artic*, chimed in at that. Their speech was less formal, making them sound like the various humans and hybrids who ran the server. *"As I'm sure some of you are aware, I am currently sharing a place with a human. Though I wouldn't turn to the human to solve this problem, I would advise using their animals to assist us. They are well-trained and intelligent enough in their own right to help us in the matter."*

The second hummed in consideration. *"There is some merit in your words. Would you be able to convince them quickly?"*

Resident-spruce-quiet-artic bobbed their head in agreement. *"If this is the one the animals speak of so fondly, I know that they will rescue the youngling and work to protect them."*

The fourth and final member of the group, *enchanter-lapis-book-magic*, took the moment to speak. *"Then, if we are all in agreement, we shall depart this place and allow resident-spruce-quiet-artic to collect their compatriots and rescue the youngling. We three shall go and spread word to all the mobs of the situation and the monster they should target. It will never be able to escape our wrath anywhere it shall travel."*

The others let out noises of agreement and then they each teleported to all corners of the server, preparing to do their part to help the abandoned youngling.

Resident-spruce-quiet-artic, or as their hybrid housemate called them, Edward, teleported straight to the large barn erected next to the place they resided. In there, they found a horse, a cow, two polar bears, several crows and many assorted barnyard animals curled up to conserve warmth. Upon their entry, all of the animals turned to face them in surprise at their sudden arrival.

They turned to look at the horse, often called Carl by the hybrid, and began to speak. *"The human you speak so fondly of, are they red-loud-gold."*

Carl neighed in affirmation. *"That human is loud to cover their softness from those that would use it against them. What brought them to your attention?"*

"An ender hybrid youngling expressed their concern over the treatment of their friend, the human youngling. Apparently, their human elders left them in the care of a youngling harmer, a monster, and failed to act to protect the youngling. An ender elder swore to the hybrid youngling that we would intercede on their behalf instead."

The smaller polar bear referred to as Baba growled in displeasure. *"They would allow harm to come to a cub, especially one so sweet? They do not deserve the cub then. If no one else is*

willing to step in and protect the cub, then I will take them in."

The other polar bear, named Steve, rumbled their agreement. *"I am willing to help protect the cub."*

The crows wasted no time in chiming in as one, in the nature of a flock. *"Help the chick, help the chick."* Their caws of support quickly devolved as they hopped around and lost focus on the conversation.

The other animals voiced agreement to helping the youngling, but were less adamant in their insistence about their own involvement. Focus then shifted to the final animal to voice their opinion on the matter.

Bob the cow raised their head upon feeling their gazes settle upon them. They moo-ed in agreement. *"Hurting a calf is unacceptable, and hurting one so sweet in particular is a crime we cannot ignore."*

The barn erupted into sounds of joy and righteous anger. The enderman took it all in and took pleasure in their agreement. Now all that was left of their task was rescuing the youngling and hiding them away from the other humans who failed them.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

The rescue commences

Chapter Notes

Everyone's support and comments have been so lovely. I love you all!

This chapter was written with the help of Bastille's *Thelma and Louise*, so go give it a listen.

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy groaned as he was nudged into light wakefulness, being lifted out of the minimal warmth of his tent. It had to be Dream. No one else came to see him anymore, except Ranboo. He tried to open his eyes, not wanting to be rude to Dream by ignoring him. ~~(He couldn't be rude to his friend.)~~ However, instead of the bright neon of Dream's sweatshirt and the white of his mask, Tommy found himself looking at the torso of an enderman.

He had the energy to mutter out a weak "Ran?" before his remaining strength failed him and he slid back into unconsciousness. Yet, just before blacking out, Tommy heard an enderman's enraged cry and the whine of a horse, one that sounded remarkably familiar.

If you had asked Tommy about what he heard later, he would simply say that the fever was worsening his hallucinations.

Edward had only just picked up the human youngling when one of their netherborn brethren teleported in front of them. In a bitter and desperate tone, they informed the elder that the green monster was in the nether, coming this way.

It took a great deal of effort, but Edward was able to keep their panic at bay. They had time only to call out a warning to Carl, who had chosen to accompany them on this rescue mission, before they fled with the youngling in his arms.

At *resident-spruce-quiet-arctic's* command, Carl took off into the woods. He made no effort to hide his trail, breaking branches beneath his hooves and disturbing piles of leaves as he did. He needed to leave a clear and obvious path, one that would lead the green monster far away from the young foal he swore to protect.

He was *the* Technoblade's horse and it showed in the way Carl knew all the tricks to lose a person. After all, he learned from the best, and he was using those skills to the best that he could. Anything to offer that poor foal even a shred of peace.

Long ago, Carl had concluded that humans were confusing creatures. They placed such value on their material things, be they shiny rocks or buildings. However, when it came to their young, they seemed to have little concern. Why else would they abandon the golden foal and leave him for dead at the hands of the green monster?

For animals, it was the opposite. They placed the safety of their young above all else, and the very idea of abandoning them was unthinkable. An abandoned foal was as good as dead, no matter what species. So, since the humans saw fit to leave the golden foal for dead, the animals would protect him.

Carl carefully waded into a river, pausing near the far shore to turn upstream to begin the long process of walking home. Quietly, he hoped to himself that Technoblade was oblivious to the odd actions of his menagerie of animals, as they could do little if he decided to investigate.

Edward had panicked and teleported himself and the youngling all the way back to the barn behind Technoblade's house. Teleportation, for non-enderman, was hard on their bodies and Edward couldn't even begin to imagine the strain it put on the youngling, especially with them being in a less-than-ideal condition to begin with.

Their sudden arrival had surprised the two polar bears in residence. Baba rose to her paws, padding over to peer at the youngling they held in their arms. She cooed at the sight, sniffing at the youngling's hair.

"Aw, the cub is adorable, especially with their tuft of golden fur." She turned back to where she had been laying, gesturing to a makeshift nest formed out of various bolts of cloth.

"Place them down on the nest for it is far too cold out for a cub with so little fur. I will stay with them and keep them warm until they wake and then we can give them materials to keep warm on their own."

Edward didn't put up a fight, knowing that Baba was correct on the subject. Instead, they laid the youngling in the nest, watching as the crows dropped off a fresh one. Apparently, this nest was their doing, their form of preparation for the youngling's arrival.

Frankly, Edward privately mused, the crows were offering tribute to appease the unhappy polar bear to prevent Baba from eating them, an entirely absurd notion.

Baba settled in beside the youngling, before cracking open an eye to stare at Edward. *"Well, what are you waiting for? Go distract Technoblade and make sure they don't suspect anything and intervene if they do."*

Edward took back their mocking of the crows' actions as an angry polar bear stared them down. As fast as they could manage, they teleported into the house to go keep an eye on Technoblade.

The piglin hybrid was sitting in a chair beside the fireplace, reading a book, with delicate gold reading glasses perched on their snout. Their eyes flicked off of the page to check on who had entered their space before merely grunting in greeting and returning their attention to the page before them.

Edward settled in for several boring hours as they felt no urge to challenge Baba and their orders.

Dream jumped through the portal as fast as possible to get away from the piglins, who had apparently taken offence to his existence. As far as he knew, he hadn't struck any of them recently, and he'd worn gold whenever he took to the nether highway. Still, for some reason, he had managed to piss off every last piglin in the vicinity. Their numbers had been overwhelming and he had been forced to make a mad dash through the Logstedshire portal.

Exiting the portal presented Dream with a new problem: Tommy was nowhere to be seen. The last time he had seen the boy, he was laying on his blanket in the tent, so sick that he couldn't rise to his feet without assistance. However, now the tent was empty, and the only living creature in sight was an enderman, who immediately aggroed onto him, despite Dream avoiding eye contact.

He drew his axe, preparing for a fight. However, the enderman seemed content with simply screaming at him before teleporting away. Dream waited to see if it would reappear, but nothing happened, so he stowed his weapon. One wayward enderman was far from his biggest problem right now.

Looking around, Dream immediately spotted a trail leading into the woods further inland. It was sloppy and destructive, the sort of thing that an idiot like Tommy would make. He didn't care about the damage he caused, lacking even the barest of concerns for everyone else.

Huffing in frustration, Dream left Logstedshire to follow the path of destruction left in Tommy's wake. However, instead of finding the boy at the end of it, he found himself on the bank of a fast-moving river. Crouching on the snowy sand, Dream tried to figure out where Tommy could have gone from there. While the brat could have waded up or downstream to escape detection, Dream felt that was beyond his abilities both physically and mentally. So instead he peered around, looking for any sign of his exiled charge.

What Dream didn't notice were the multiple creepers approaching him from the rear, having been led there by the enderman who had teleported away from him not long ago. Unable to hear the sound of the creepers, the first sign he had that anything was out of the ordinary was

taking damage and getting blasted into the river, which swept him downstream before he could escape its current.

Pulling himself ashore, dripping wet, fuming, and cursing all the while, Dream decided to go home. With luck, no one would see him and he could give himself time to gather his wits before resuming the search for Tommy.

Poking his head out of the Nether portal, Ranboo took a nervous look around, just to double-check that Dream wasn't visiting Tommy. Seeing no sign of the neon green hoodie the admin wore, the enderman hybrid stepped out onto the sandy beach and began searching for Tommy, a task that was proving far more difficult than it should have been. As far as Ranboo was aware, Tommy was not well enough to get up and wander off randomly and none of Tommy's usual haunts showed any sign of a recent visit by the blonde.

Having another glance in the tent revealed to Ranboo a sign that something was not right. He picked up the blanket lying on the dirt and found dried blood stains on the underside of the blanket. A closer examination also revealed that blood had soaked into the bottom of the tent, long dried and left to fester.

Ranboo, instinctively clutching the blanket to his chest, tried his best not to cry as he warbled out a distressed sob over Tommy's uncertain fate.

Chapter End Notes

Dream: *hunting Tommy*

The mobs: "get effing yote, loser"

Since school has started up for me, I will try to post a chapter a week, alternating between this fic and my pirate AU.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

The server notices that something is up (and fails to react like the chumps they are)

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

Chapter Notes

Shoutout to Dee and Jack_hat for inspiring this chapter.

(This is officially the longest thing I have written in a week and I don't think I'm going to repeat the endeavor during a school week ever.)

You are all so lovely and I appreciate you all so much.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Techno knew that something had changed with all his animals, but he had no clue on how to address these changes, much less handle them.

One of the first signs he had was unusual behaviour from Edward. The usually docile enderman usually just sat by the fire, playing with a block of grass and dirt. Now, he seemed to spend nearly all of his time watching and following Technoblade. Of course, these changes could be brushed off as instincts from his house mob.

What really alerted him to the problem at hand was when he attempted to enter his barn to saddle up Carl. He expected the animals to perk up when they spied him, maybe give some sort of greeting. What he got instead was an angry polar bear charging him, throwing itself against the doors as Techno slammed them shut.

The hybrid braced himself against the doors, preparing for a second attempt. However, none came. Instead, lumbering footsteps retreated deeper into the barn, which allowed him to take a few breaths, relaxing his tense muscles. Keeping his ears perked, he tentatively opened the door again.

Baba was curled up on a pile of blankets, her back to him. Bob was lying on her far side, staring up at him with an unreadable gaze. In fact, all of his animals were staring at him, and he couldn't tell if their gazes were hostile or not. Either way, it wasn't welcoming.

"Is this where all of my blankets have gotten to?" Techno grumbled to himself as he moved to take a closer look at the polar bear's nest. He managed to take a single step towards the pile, then Baba raised her head and growled at him, freezing him in place.

Steve then stepped into his path, using his nose to push Techno away from the nest and towards Carl. Unsurprisingly, the horse was standing next to his wall of tack, far away from the angry polar bear. Saddling up his horse, Techno made the executive decision to mount Carl outside, far away from Baba and her territorial rage.

Riding away from his cabin, Techno looked down at Carl with an exasperated glance. "What's *her* problem? She's never been that upset before, so what sent her into such a tailspin?"

Carl whinnied anxiously beneath him and Techno nodded at the response.

"Eyup. You're right. We're staying out of the barn until she calms down. Attempting to question this situation sounds like a lot of work and I am in no hurry to die at the paws of an angry polar bear."

Carl neighed in what Techno assumed to be agreement and so he patted Carl's neck and continued on.

(Rarely setting hoof in the Nether and never talking to his Piglin cousins meant that Technoblade had missed out on some important information about their view of the man who claimed power over the area. Ignorance may be bliss but knowledge is power.)

Sam never paid much attention to his feral brethren, save for when they got a bit too close to the builds across the server. Still, even he noticed when a creeper walked right past Bad without making a move in the demon's direction. In fact, the creeper didn't even give Bad a passing glance, acting like he wasn't even there.

Sam was so shocked that he was left frozen in place, his green skin turning pale at the sight. For a creeper to ignore a player like that... It was unheard of!

"Sam?" Bad's voice broke through Sam's shock, making him turn. The demon was looking at him with a mix of concern and disappointment. "Sam, are you alright? You don't look good. When was the last time you rested? Don't tell me you're neglecting your health while grinding away in the mines. Honestly-"

Sam cut off Bad's fussing by pointing at the creeper that had walked behind the demon without reacting. Bad twisted around to see what had caught Sam's attention, quickly spotting the normally hostile mob.

"Well, that's...new?" Bad turned back to Sam. "Do creepers normally do this?"

"No," Sam shook his head, "I've never heard of this before. They don't usually go for me unless I go for them first, but I've never seen them pass up on the opportunity to attack a

player. This one didn't even give you a second look."

Bad let out a laugh. "Probably was distracted by your presence. Maybe I should hang around you more if it means automatic creeper protection."

(Bad was quick to put the incident out of his mind. Sure it had been unusual, but Bad was a demon and he had seen weirder things before. Thus, he just shrugged and moved on.)

(Sam had a harder time letting go of the event but it quickly got pushed to the side as he dedicated all time and energy to the build he was contracted to make. Eventually, after not thinking about the event for a while, it faded from his mind, and was lost to the passage of time.)

Fundy's ears perked up when he heard the chittering calls of the foxes in the forest. They seemed pleased with themselves, a sure sign that they had been up to no good.

When he caught sight of them, his mouth dropped open at the scene before him. At least half a dozen foxes were running through the woods, dragging items along with them as they ran. The items were seemingly random until he noticed that two of the foxes were carrying two very distinctive items: Dream's sweatshirt and his mask.

Fundy snorted at the sight, watching his feral kin run off with Dream's things. Still, he didn't put much thought into the reason behind the theft. He figured that Dream had simply stepped on the tail of one and the foxes were getting their revenge in their mischievous way.

(What Fundy failed to notice was the number of foxes and the sheer amount of things stolen. This was not only a single pack acting on behalf of one of their own, but several of the packs that lived in the forest working together. Plus, not only did the foxes steal all of Dream's spare hoodies and masks, but they also took every single item they could get their paws onto.)

If there was one thing Quackity didn't have time for, it was the local birdlife. Hearing them go on and on about their opinions and problems was something he didn't have time for. So when the waterfowl started whispering about some "Green Monster," Quackity tuned them out. After all, he had bigger fish to fry, namely killing himself a fat pig. Talk of killing Dream could come later.

The matter was quickly pushed from his mind as it held little interest to him. After all, there were things afoot and Quackity had no time to waste.

(This lack of concern would come back to haunt him when the power balance of the server rapidly shifted.)

Puffy, with all of her finely honed instincts from her years of being a pirate, was aware that something had changed. It was as if the air had taken on a new heaviness. However, no

matter where she looked, nothing gave her any indication that anything was different.

She let it go for the time being, but she didn't fully relax, always keeping that realisation in the corner of her mind.

(A boy that she once offered help had slipped her mind, a mistake that she would later regret.)

Foolish, unlike what his name suggested, was anything but. Thus, when the mobs around him began to ignore him rather than attack, he was aware that something had happened.

Unfortunately, the mobs in his area were most unwilling to explain what had happened to cause the alteration to their habits. Foolish was thus left to piece together what he could from the tidbits of gossip he managed to overhear.

As far as he could tell, a powerful, terrifying, and well-connected creature had an offspring who had been harmed by a human. They never referred to this creature by name or the human who hurt them. All he ever got was that the offender's actions had caused a backlash that had marked the human as their sole target for the foreseeable future.

While it was strange news indeed, it explained everything to Foolish, so he left the mobs to their revenge. He had work to do, and a desert temple to build.

(The Totem had been close in their assessment but had missed a few key details. As such, his choice to stay out of the situation would have drastic consequences.)

Phil was so used to ignoring the flock of crows that followed him that it took almost a week before he noticed their odd behaviour. Really, the only reason he even noticed was that they were raiding his stuff, and it wasn't even their normal raids either.

While their usual shiny objects were still being targeted, there were more unusual items in the pile. Everything from blankets to bandages, loose fabric, wool, potions, sticks, and needle and thread. The entire time, the crows were bobbing their heads up and down at each other, cawing excitedly.

"Baby bird, baby bird, chick, chick, chick. Sacrifices for the mother. Safety. Gifts, gifts, gifts."

Phil laughed at their antics before shaking his head and returning his focus to the book before him, one he had read many times before but still held some slight interest to him.

(He never bothered to figure out what the birds were doing with the stuff they took, never noticing that they flew south, towards the tundra Techno called home.

Age breeds complacency and the Angel of Death proved no exception to this rule. So blind to the changes occurring around him after millennia of existence left him in the dark about the new age he was entering.)

Sapnap only realised something was amiss when he visited the Nether fortress. The hisses of the blazes sounded angrier than usual. The blaze hybrid was used to the anger of the full-blooded blazes, but it normally came out much more passively than the tone they were using now.

When the group of blazes caught sight of him, they fell silent, instead choosing to stare at him. Lowering his sword, Sapnap raised an eyebrow at their odd behaviour. *“What’s the matter with all of you?”*

One of the blazes drifted closer to him, floating high enough that it seemed to loom above him. *“You humans have done something unforgivable, especially that green-!”*

Another blaze cut the first off. *“Fool, what is the point of telling the human about the crimes of their kind, especially since this one is close to the guilty party? They will do nothing with the knowledge, which is why we’re involved.”*

Sapnap cleared his throat causing the two blazes to return their attention to him. *“Are you suggesting Dream of all people would do something THAT bad? No, I don’t believe you. There’s no way he’s capable of anything that bad.”*

The second blaze turned their gaze back to the first before huffing out a *“Told you so.”* Glancing back at Sapnap, they continued. *“So long as you refuse to accept the truth, you are not welcome in this fortress, nor, I think, will you be welcome in any other. Begone, human! For you are not welcome here any longer.”*

With that, all of the blazes in the group took their leave. Sapnap rolled his eyes in frustration but complied with the blazes, returning home without any of the items he set out to gather.

(He ignored what the blazes had warned him about. After all, that was his best friend they were talking about. What sort of person would he be if he believed his friend was capable of these acts? Surely he would have noticed if Dream had become a monster.

This deliberate ignorance on his part left him even more confident in his friend as he desperately worked to convince his brain that the blazes were wrong. The lenses he looked through left him blind to the truth that his kin had shared.)

Tubbo holed himself up in the White House, focusing on the task set before him. He barely gave himself a breather between the stacks upon stacks of paperwork. He had no clue when the last time he saw the sun was, and he had even less of an idea when he last relaxed.

He was the President of New L’Manberg, the leader of the rebuilt country that needed a stable leader. It didn’t matter that he was barely 17, it was his job. He needed to make sure everyone was safe, that the Greater SMP wouldn’t try to oppress them again, and then there was the whole thing with Quackity’s Butcher Army.

Planning out someone's execution was more difficult than he suspected, leaving him curious about how Schlatt managed to plan his while constantly drunk.

Still, it was better than thinking about Tommy. He had to try and force the thoughts of his exiled best friend from his mind, for his own sanity if nothing else. Tubbo was terrified that his friend would hate him forever, so he just shut down at the mere thought of him. Any mention of Tommy's name was enough to send the president into a spiral.

Thus he spent his days drowning in paperwork, clutching the compass Ghostbur had given him close to his chest.

(The goat hybrid had closed his ears to the whispers of the nature around him. As such, he was deaf to the warning that was spreading across the land.)

Ranboo returned to New L'Manberg with Tommy's ratty blanket and some fresh tear scars. Grief was difficult for him, especially when he couldn't properly mourn his friend. His memory issues made him cling hard to the painful memories, but he also couldn't tell anyone why he was mourning.

As he shuffled morosely towards his home, he noticed that an enderman was lurking nearby, keeping watch over him. This stalkerish behaviour gave Ranboo paranoia about this state of affairs.

It, therefore, came as no surprise to him that when he heard an enderman's greeting from behind, he took a swing at the source.

His axe blade would have cut the enderman down in an instant, but they had left a space between them, so Ranboo ended up missing completely. He also found himself recognizing the enderman as the elder from Logstedshire. Ranboo lowered his weapon sheepishly, attempting to wipe his face clean of his tears.

"Youngling, why are you upset?" The enderman reached one claw forward to gently brush over the scars under his eyes.

Ranboo shivered at the concern being shown to him. The first being to notice the new burns on his face, and it was an enderman he had only ever met once, not any of the people he spent so much of his time with. It shook him to the core, the realisation that those he called friends didn't feel the same way about him.

"My friend, elder... They have passed on. If only I had acted to save them, maybe they would still be alive."

The elder tilted their head to the side in confusion. *"Youngling, have you forgotten the last time we spoke?"*

Ranboo blinked up at them. While he recognized them, his memory of their talk had already drifted away in his mind. *"Yes, elder. I forget many things."*

A calming warble rattled its way out of the enderman's throat. *"Be not afraid, youngling, for you brought up your fears about your friend's condition to me the last time we spoke. I can promise you that your friend is safe."*

Ranboo felt like he could cry again but managed to refrain from doing more damage to himself. Tommy wasn't dead. He was alive, and out of that horrible exile! This time he whipped out his memory journal, but before writing down this new information, he hesitated.

"Youngling, what is wrong? Why do you hesitate?" The elder looked concerned at the hybrid's odd behavior.

"I don't want to put my friend in danger. If another gets their hands on my journal, they will know that my friend is somewhere they should not be. I can't allow that to happen because of me."

The elder rumbled, a noise that had Ranboo instinctively relaxing. *"Youngling, are you not aware of the written form of Ender?"*

Ranboo blinked at the elder in surprise. If they were aware, they had no doubt forgotten long ago.

Stretching out their paw, the elder twitched their claws at Ranboo until the hybrid handed over the journal and a pen. Noticing the puzzled look on the youngling's face, the elder warbled out a laugh as they wrote a simple line of text on one of the blank pages.

"I've been around long enough, youngling, to learn the art of penmanship. You see, you are not the first hybrid I have been fortunate to meet. Come, look at what I have written. Maybe Ender will help with your memory issues."

Ranboo took one look at the unusual symbols that had been written on the page and found his brain immediately translating them to English, even though he could have sworn that he had never learned that script.

Taking back his journal, he clutched it to his chest, chirping his thanks to the other. The elder patted his head before taking their leave and teleporting elsewhere.

Across the lands of the SMP, people went about their normal lives, mostly unaware of the growing discontent of the mobs that also inhabited the realm. While a few noticed the change, they were quick to dismiss it or rationalise their worries away. None of them mentioned it to anyone else, allowing their blinders to stay on longer.

To the mobs, the lack of interest expressed towards the disappearance of one of their young only hardened their resolve to make the child one of their own, to provide the child with the protection that they had lacked before while they lived in the care of humans.

Only one enderman hybrid was aware of the cause for all of this, but even he had no reason to know what the consequences of this change would be.

During all of this, a blonde slept on undisturbed, slowly recovering from his illness in the care of an assortment of mobs who had assigned themselves to his care. He had no clue about the events that were playing out because of him.

Chapter End Notes

Citizen Soldier's new song is so good (and so depressing).

(Am I supposed to be doing homework? Yes. Am I doing it? No)

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Tommy is having the *weirdest* fever dream, Baba feels guilt, the dogs have appeared, and Techno is in denial.

Chapter Notes

Tommy has arrived (at least awoken.)

Chat is bolded so you don't confuse it with the animal-speech.

Feel free to suggest things that you want to see and I'll see if I can work them in.

Shoutout to LexWithAnX, who reminded me of the fact that the dog army existed, because they totally slipped my mind.

You guys are the best and I love the comments you guys have left (even if my responses seem awkward), they are so effing nice to read.

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy was warm. It wasn't the warmth of his fever, which had sapped his body of what little heat he had managed to maintain in his pitiful conditions. It wasn't the warmth of a fire either, not that he ever had enough wood or sticks to maintain one. No, this was a luxurious warmth that seeped into his body and made him feel... well, better than he had been since his exile.

Peeling his eyes open, Tommy tried to figure out what the source of this warmth was. However, the first thing he was was a blurry brown object above him. That didn't make any sense, since his tent was blue, and he never slept in the cabin Ghostbur had made. ~~(He didn't deserve to sleep there.)~~

Blinking his eyes in an attempt to focus them, Tommy was confronted with a white furry mass lying by his right side. Paying attention, he realised that while the warmth on his right ran the entire length of him, on his left, the warmth was more piecemeal.

Tommy turned his head to see if he could make sense of the little pockets of warmth on the left and was immediately confronted with the face of a dog. Said dog immediately licked his

face, yipping happily at his attention.

Jerking backward into the white fur on his other side, Tommy sputtered as he tried to raise his hand to wipe off the saliva. However, he found that he couldn't. Instead, he discovered that several dogs were surrounding him, some of which had laid down all over him. This left him very warm, but also very trapped.

The white mass behind him shifted, prompting Tommy to turn his head to see a polar bear lying next to him. He blinked, surprised that his fever dream felt so warm... so *real*. He hummed, genuinely surprised that his brain was actually being nice to him. It was *never* nice to him, so the fact that it let him fantasise about warmth and company was... nice.

Tommy smiled weakly at the polar bear and he swore that he heard them coo at him, though he put it down to his imagination. Honestly, the whole situation was so bizarre that Tommy was convinced that his fever had mixed with his hallucinations to create the situation he now found himself in.

"Pretty polar bear," he mumbled in fevered appreciation for his imaginary companion. "I love you, you know that? You are so poggers and... and you're the best."

Tommy snuggled back into the warmth that surrounded him, leaning into the fur of the polar bear and falling asleep. After all, if he was going to hallucinate warmth and nice animals, he was going to enjoy it as long as he could. Maybe when he woke back to Logstedshire and Dream, this hallucination would be something to cheer him up.

Baba was absolutely elated. Her new, golden-furred cub had woken up and didn't panic at discovering that he was sleeping next to a polar bear. Instead, he complimented her and cuddled up to her, trusting her enough to fall back asleep.

"He's so adorable." She turned her head to look at her companion with love in her gaze. *"Look, Steve. Look how precious he is. I can't believe the humans would allow harm to come to him."*

Steve sighed, rising to his paws before padding over to look down at her cub. *"It's really just their loss. But because of their failings, we now have a cub of our own."*

Baba felt conflicted at the mention of the humans. On one hand, harm had come to the cub, which was beyond unforgivable. On the other, that harm had been the reason she had him in her den.

Someone bumped into her back, prompting her to twist her muzzle to look. Bob stood behind her, as calm as ever. *"Calm yourself, for you deserve no blame for what happened to the calf. There was nothing you could do to help him before and now you are here to protect him from any more harm. You care, Baba, that's all you need to do."*

The cow, a practical animal, spoke the truth, even though Baba struggled to accept it. She huffed and turned back to rest her head on her cub's stomach, letting Bob's words settle into

her mind.

The sea of dogs scattered throughout the barn rose as one, setting off the latest round of their fight to be the select few who cuddled up against the cub's other side. Baba watched in amusement as they play fought in an attempt to take one of the next spots. One by one, some dogs began making their way over to lie next to the "*pup*" as one of them yipped.

Finally, with only one space left, a howl emerged from the massive dog pile, which immediately scattered, leaving a young female in the centre victorious. She made her way over before settling down with a huff. The remaining dogs once more made themselves comfortable, waiting for the next chance that they would have. Baba chuffed at their antics, knowing that this fighting for dominance play was something ingrained in them by the hybrid who had originally made this barn for his personal use.

The polar bear cared little for the walking pig, given that he was as guilty as the rest of the humans for abandoning the cub. Yes, they had done far less than the green monster had, but the hybrid had still left the cub alone. Therefore, commandeering his property for herself and the other animals was fine. And if it wasn't, well, she would have no problem putting him in his place.

Technoblade was doing his best to forget that his barn existed. He had made the executive decision that Carl deserved his own stable, which he promptly built on the opposite end of his cottage. Technoblade Never Dies, but Technoblade also knew better than to mess with an angry polar bear, one who had proven herself more than willing to tear his snout off without hesitation.

A howl disturbed the tranquil peace of the tundra, causing Techno to twitch before he forcefully refocused his attention on his book. Whatever was going on in that building, it was none of his concern, something all of his animals had made *quite* clear. Thus, whenever he heard noises coming from the barn, he forcefully kicked it from his mind and distracted himself by doing something.

Apparently, his dog army had joined in on whatever was going on in the stable, which was a pity because it meant he wasn't able to go see them.

Softblade

Dogs!!!!!!

Softsoftsoft

o7 boys, the blade has fallen

Pets for the Dog God

(He wasn't soft, chat, he was just a practical hybrid. After all, everyone knew that dogs would work better if he created a sense of loyalty in them.)

Sure~

Real convincing

Give the doggos love
Pet the puppies

A knock on the door startled Techno from his thoughts. Phil, the only other person who knew where he lived, never knocked. Why would he when he was always welcome? No, this was someone new. Someone *uninvited*.

Tensing, Techno put the bookmark in his book, summoning his armour and drawing his sword before approaching the door. He had more friends than enemies, so he was just being sensible. Being retired didn't make him weak or stupid.

Ready for whatever was waiting on the other side of the door, Technoblade threw it open, sword at the ready...

Chapter End Notes

As it is a break week, you all will be getting another chapter Sunday (as long as nothing goes wrong.)

Also, Pebble Brain rocked (my favs were The Fall and Perfume), however, in other awesome music news, Earthrise (Starset) and Fix You (cover by the Brooklyn Duo and the Dover Quartet) also rock.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Dream's terrible, horrible, no good, very bad ~~day~~ time

Chapter Notes

Dream's suffering continues. (Some of you guessed who was at the door, so good job).

I do express thoughts in italics, but it is in a different section than the animal speech, so confusion should be minimal.

Love the support, all. Your comments are absolutely my favorite drug.

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Dream stood on the snow-covered front porch of Technoblade's house, shivering as the cold, arctic winds tore through his sweatshirt. He adjusted his mask for the umpteenth time, wishing that the leather strap wasn't so stretched. It didn't sit right, and his sweatshirt was far too thin for this frigid weather. Not that he could do much about that... or anything about his current state.

The past few days had been the worst that Dream could remember. Ever since Tommy ran away from Logstedshire, the admin's luck had taken a very sharp nosedive. All of the mobs on the server had turned against him, even the passive mobs. Dream still shuttered at the thought of the swarm of bees that had attacked him unprompted, and the sheep that had nearly bitten his finger off when he tried to shear it.

To make matters worse, his base had been broken into, robbing him of all his things. The thieves had gotten into his food, his supplies, and even his clothes. This left him with only the things he was carrying, and the clothes on his back. He couldn't even open his ender chest! The eye on it closed whenever he got close and the lid refused to budge! What was going on?!

No one, not even George or Sapnap, knew the location of his base, so the loss of his possessions was baffling. On top of that, his clothes had suffered serious damage as a result of all the mob attacks and his last attempt at repairing them had led to the aforementioned sheep attack. Without a change of clothes or a means to fix the ones he had, he looked awful.

The only real upside to the week was that no one had seen the state he was in, though that was about to change. Still, it would be worth it, seeing as Dream had finally managed to track down Tommy. It was just like him to hide behind his big brother, a child hiding from the real world and the consequences of his choices.

The door swung open, which led to the admin staring down the blade of Technoblade's sword, the piglin hybrid armed and on guard. It took everything in Dream not to flinch as the tip nicked his throat before Techno realised who he was and lowered the sword.

"Heh?" the warrior let out, clearly confused by his presence.

Ignoring the tiny wound on his neck (one of far too many at this point anyhow), Dream smiled behind his mask, oozing confidence and power as he spoke. "Hello, Technoblade."

Techno seemed unimpressed by his swagger. "What do you want, Dream?"

"I'm here for Tommy, Techno." Dream summoned his own sword, toying with it in his hand. "I know he's here, and it's time for him to go back where he belongs."

The confusion returned to the piglin's eyes and Dream felt dread pooling in his stomach. Techno did not have the social aptitude for bluffing, so he knew that his confusion was genuine. Then again, Techno had been around for a while and knew a trick or two that made keeping secrets easy. One didn't live as long as the Blade did without such skills.

"Bruh, Tommy isn't here." He even *sounded* sincere, and more than a little annoyed. "In fact, he's not welcome here, not that he even knows where this place is."

Dream hummed, letting his doubt seep into the note. However, before he could demand the return of what was his, Technoblade cocked his head to the side and stared at Dream in concentration.

"You okay, Dream?" He eyed the admin up and down. "You look like a homeless bum."

Dream spluttered in shock and a hint of rage. "I'm not homeless, I have a house."

Technoblade raised a singular eyebrow. "Prove it. And it better not be some cave, or dirt shack, or a box."

"I have a house!" Dream's collected façade was crumbling rapidly. "I don't need to prove anything to you!"

"Dudes, this guy doesn't have a house," the piglin jeered, clearly addressing the voices in his head, ignoring Dream's constant protests of having a house. "He owns the server, but he's a homeless-"

"I AM NOT HOMELESS!" He could feel veins popping on his forehead.

Techno crossed his arms, grinning from ear to ear. "Well, you look the part."

"I AM-" Dream cut himself off with a hiss, forcing himself to breathe through his clenched teeth. He could feel a headache brewing. "Look, just hand over Tommy and I'll get off of your porch."

"What, so you can go sleep under it?"

Dream was seconds from screaming, so glad for the mask that ensured Technoblade didn't get the satisfaction of knowing that he got to him. Although, from the smirk on the glorified pig's face, it was a moot sentiment.

"Listen Techno, just give me Tommy. You're not doing anyone any favours by harbouring him."

Technoblade rolled his eyes, though Dream felt if anyone should be rolling their eyes, it was him. "I've told you already, Tommy isn't here. Go be homeless somewhere else, ya damn Teletubby."

"What did you-?" A ruckus from the barn to the side of Technoblade's cabin caught Dream's attention, causing him to break off mid-sentence. Techno's gaze followed where his attention had gone and the warrior immediately stiffened.

Bingo.

Not waiting for any lies or excuses, the admin hopped off the porch, approaching the barn. How poetic; the wild child hiding with the animals. Behind him, Techno followed close behind, no doubt trying to salvage this plan of his.

"I wouldn't open that door if I were you."

Dream merely rolled his eyes at the hybrid's warning. Sure, Techno had won their big duel, but Dream had given as good as he got, and the admin was confident that he could take the piglin if it came down to it.

"Are you *threatening* me, Technoblade?"

Technoblade scoffed, which did nothing to Dream's nonexistent fear of him. "I'm not the biggest threat in this situation."

That confused Dream, but he took it as a compliment, (mostly because the idea of something scarier than either of them did not even occur to him).

Rolling his eyes once more at Technoblade's dramatics, Dream swung open the barn door, already preparing a lecture for his wayward prey to make sure he understood what he had done wrong. Unfortunately for him, his speech was transformed into a terrified scream as a massive polar started charging at him.

His shitty luck wasn't *that* bad, because Techno managed to grab him by the scruff of his hood, yanking him out of the doorway within a second of his undignified shriek. His pride did take a massive blow as he was unceremoniously thrown into a snowbank, allowing the hybrid to slam the doors shut before the polar bear had a chance to maul him.

Slowly, Dream pulled himself out of the snow, his clothes now completely covered in the freezing powder as he spat out a mouthful. He turned to face the chortling hybrid, adjusting his mask to cover his beet-red face. "What on earth are you teaching your pets?"

Technoblade straightened, a haunted look entering his eyes. "I didn't teach them anything. One day, everything was fine and the next, Baba was doing her best to murder me. Current hypothesis is that she recently gave birth, and the whole Mama Bear thing isn't just a goofy trope."

Before Dream could demand more answers from the hybrid, a massive swarm of birds appeared overhead and began to divebomb him. The admin took this as a sign to give up on the entire venture and begin pearling away, writing off the entire day as a loss. Based on his previous experiences with these overly hostile mobs, it would take the rest of the day for them to lose interest in making his life miserable for the time being.

So much for his luck taking a turn in his favour. He had no Tommy, Techno thought he was a joke, and whatever shred of dignity he still had was lost the second he was manhandled into that snowbank. That burned worst of all, knowing that the piglin had seen him brought low and was no doubt laughing at his misfortune.

(Technoblade, meanwhile, was doing his best to forget the entire day. He just wanted some peace, which was the entire reason he moved out to the tundra in the first place. Instead, he found himself stressed out, confused, and strung out. Maybe he needed to go hibernate for a few months, try and sleep through all this madness.)

(He knew deep down that it was a futile thought)

Baba huffed at Steve as her mate sat grooming himself.

"You should have killed the monster," she insisted. "His threat needs to be removed from this world, for the cub's sake, and everyone else's."

Steve looked unimpressed at Baba's words. *"How many lives do you think he still has left? Killing him this time was unlikely to remove the threat from existence. All it would do would draw undue attention to us. Besides, charging at him scared him off and I doubt he will attempt to return here."*

Baba wrinkled up her snout in frustration, though she knew that Steve was correct. Didn't mean she had to like it. She was pulled from her grumbling as Carl whinnied beside her. *"The crows did a wonderful job of driving him off and will chase him for a while, which will only serve to disturb his plans further."*

Edward rumbled from their corner, eyes blazing with amusement as they played with their grass block. *"The green monster's expression was hilarious. They froze at the sight of Steve and the look of abject horror in their body language was delightful as the crows attacked."*

Baba shifted and huffed, though her companions were able to sense her amusement. Movement from her other side caused the polar bear to break away from the conversation to peer at the cub. He was wiggling closer to her warmth, burying his paws in her fur. She cooed at him, happy to distract herself with the cuteness curled up next to her.

Chapter End Notes

Starset's new album (Horizons) just dropped and it's so effing good, go check it out.

If any bit is confusing, just reach out and I'll do my best to fix it.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Illness recovery, extra-judicial execution planning, and explosions, oh my

Chapter Notes

Apologies for this chapter taking so long to come out and being short, it really didn't want to be written and I've been fighting with it. Next chapter should be longer as I have actual ideas for the direction I want.

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When Tommy finally awoke for real, he felt warm and relaxed. Immediately, he knew something was up. He was still sick as a dog, not to mention starving and weak with painful wounds all across his body. The last thing he could clearly remember was laying down in his tent to try and rest before Dream's next visit. ~~(Dream calling him lazy and rude and a terrible friend still rang in his ear. He didn't mean to be like that, honest! He was a big man, but big men still got sick! Please don't be mad, Dream, Please-)~~

He pushed himself upward, only to glance down in confusion as something fell down his front. There was fabric pooled on his lap, fabric he didn't recognize. Puzzled, Tommy turned his head to try and figure out where he was. His confusion started to turn to panic as nothing around him looked even remotely familiar. There was no blue tent, no birch cabin, just an unfamiliar spruce building.

There was a rumble off to his left, causing him to freeze and slowly turn to face the source of the sound. To his shock, it was a giant polar bear, who upon seeing that he was awake, immediately licked his face

Tommy sputtered and gagged, forcing his weakened limbs to move so he could remove the slobber. None of this made any sense. Why was there a polar bear in Logstedshire? And why was it snuggling him like he was a cub?

Blinking in an attempt to make sense of the situation, Tommy realised that the polar bear wasn't the only animal currently using him as a teddy bear. In fact, he was surrounded by a wide assortment of animals, all of whom had turned to face him now that he was awake.

The horse was one he recognized immediately. How could he not know Carl, the beloved horse and close companion of his older brother Technoblade? No matter how tense things were between him and his elder brother, Tommy never forgot an animal, especially one as special as Carl.

"Carl," he managed to croak out, attempting to get up so he could pet the horse.

Apparently, that wasn't in the cards for him. Not because he was weak, big men were never weak, but because it upset the polar bear beside him. The dogs were also unhappy with this decision of his, one of them immediately flopping on his lap, pinning him to the pile of blankets he was sitting on.

The dog was warm and their fur was so soft, the gentle feeling of their heartbeat on his chest making Tommy feel oddly content. Maybe this forced rest wasn't a bad thing, especially if he got to keep petting this beautiful animal. He ran his fingers through the dog's fur, smiling down at it.

~~(At least animals still cared about him. Even if it didn't last, they stuck around longer than people did. He needed something good in his life for once, so he happily let his confusion and worries drift from his mind just for a little bit. He just wanted to feel a small piece of joy, for however long he was allowed to have it.)~~

Quackity stood at the head of the Butcher Army's meeting room table, slamming his palms hard on the wooden surface as he glared at the teen President in front of him. "I don't think you understand how important this is, Tubbo. We need to kill Technoblade. He's gone unpunished long enough, and L'Manberg *deserves* justice."

Tubbo frowned at him, bags under his eyes and his hair a greasy mess. ~~(He looked worse than Schlatt did.)~~ "I understand perfectly, Big Q. However, no one knows where he is. Kinda hard to execute someone if we don't know where they are."

Fundy, who had been leaning nonchalantly against the door frame, straightened up a bit. He had a sly look on his face, the one he got when he had a prank idea. "*We* might not know where the Blade is, but I know someone who does."

Quackity's smile returned, sharp and cruel. "Of course! Philza Minecraft! The two are like old friends or some shit, right?"

Tubbo nodded, but still looked grim. "Um, slight problem. This is Philza Minecraft we're talking about. There is no way he's just gonna *tell* us where Techno is."

Fundy smirked, approaching the table before leaning in. "Well even if he's not willing to talk, I'm sure that there's something at his place that could give us a lead. My grandfather's rather sentimental that way. He'll have a picture, some sort of trinket, something we can make use of."

"And when we get there, how do you plan on getting Technoblade to come with us back to L'Manberg?" Tubbo laced his fingers together, leaning forward over the table. "He's Technoblade, in case you forgot."

Quackity huffed out a laugh. "It's four against one, Tubbo. We'll have full netherite, a slew of potions, our axes, and we'll have the element of surprise. Not even Technoblade will stand a chance against us."

Tubbo nodded in acknowledgment, his concerns finally satisfied, at least for the time being. "Sounds like we have a plan. All we need is to--"

Quackity held up a hand, interrupting the President. Tubbo gave him an annoyed glare, but the avian ignored him, turning his head to face Ranboo. The enderman sat in the corner of the room, supposedly taking notes on the meeting. However, he just seemed to be staring at his journal and ignoring everyone else in the cabinet. It really grated on his nerves.

"Hey! Ranboo!" Quackity snapped, making Ranboo jolt slightly. When the enderman turned to look at him, the kid had the audacity to look annoyed. "We don't have time for worthless layabouts, kid. So how about you get your head out of the clouds and contribute, or stop wasting our time and leave?"

Normally, this would be where the enderman hybrid would offer a sheepish apology before returning to his job. Instead, Ranboo closed his book, rose to his feet, and immediately started to walk out of the room. It was so out of character for the spineless hybrid that it had all three of the remaining cabinet members reeling.

Tubbo was the first to recover, his face losing its composure before twisting into a scowl. It only lasted for a moment before he forcefully smoothed it back into a placid mask. "If you walk out that door Ranboo, you are out of my cabinet. We don't have time for people who won't pull their own weight."

Ranboo didn't even slow at Tubbo's words, exiting the room without any hesitation.

As the door slid shut behind the retreating enderman, the remaining cabinet members were left staring. This was beyond out of character for Ranboo, leaving them all stunned. However, they were quick to brush the hybrid from their minds, returning to the task at hand. They had bigger issues than some wayward teenager. There was justice to be served, for the good of L'Manberg.

Dream looked at the wreckage of his base and did his best not to cry. Crying was beneath a man of his status. Even so, the urge was very strong after everything he'd endured.

He had managed to gather a few materials in between his bouts of escaping from the insanely hostile mobs, but they had almost immediately been stolen right out of his chests. To make matters worse, after *finally* managing to snag a little bit of rest, six creepers had gotten into his base and exploded.

Everything was gone. His secret base, carved into the side of a mountain, had been completely eradicated. Any things that may have survived the blast or the constant raids were destroyed in the other five explosions, leaving his home a dark, empty hole.

How could this be happening? He'd had it all figured out! He had isolated the biggest problem to the server, so close to moulding him into his ultimate puppet. He had put pressure on the L'Manberg president, and he could tell the goat kid was inches away from completely snapping. He even managed to sow seeds in their little cabinet to get them to go after Technoblade! He was so close to having his server back under control that he could *taste* it!

So why was everything going wrong?! He had broken tools, badly damaged armour, barely any food, and his base was completely gone. Even worse, his dignity was in shreds after that embarrassing display in front of Technoblade. He had been scared by a *polar bear*! *A tame* polar bear!

Part of him insisted that the bear had been protecting Tommy, but he quickly dismissed that notion in fear of what he might face when he returned. Besides, once Tommy screwed up again, even the animals would get rid of him, meaning Dream could just take back his toy at his own leisure.

Forcing himself to breathe, Dream got himself under control. This was just... some unfortunate luck. He just needed to gather his wits and restrategize. Once he did that, he could get the server back under control, and everything would be perfect again.

Smiling to himself, Dream adjusted his mask and surveyed the wreckage before him once more. Honestly, it was probably time for him to relocate anyhow. If he was getting robbed, then his base was compromised, and he needed a new place to start.

(Unfortunately for Dream, his musings left him vulnerable and exposed, which a nearby skeleton jockey immediately took advantage of. It shot the admin right in the shoulder, just as a seventh creeper exploded right behind him, launching him into the crater and shattering his chest plate, as well as his mask.)

(Dream lay face down on the ground, surrounded by the shattered pieces of his mask, wondering if crying was the appropriate reaction to everything.)

Chapter End Notes

Feel free to suggest things that you want to see in the comments, I'd love to see them. See ya soon, I promise.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Tommy is bonding (and related activities), Fundy might need to chill honestly, Ranboo dips but hardcore, the animals notice something strange, and Dream really should see a doctor.

Basically, everyone but the animals should be seeing a therapist.

Chapter Notes

This was supposed to be a fun heist chapter, what happened?

I had to rewrite this chapter multiple times as Ranboo kept getting both deep and dark and this fic is at least somewhat lighthearted, but apparently this Ranboo really wanted to get philosophical and chose violence.

As it turns out, Dream is not the big evil man he tries to be as I keep making him come across (at least to myself) as a cartoon villain.

Also, sorry for the delay, family holidays and all that were not conducive to writing productivity.

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The dogs were all fighting, but it wasn't in a violent, mean way that the teen had seen far too much of recently. No, this was the kind of playful, non-aggressive play fighting that families always did. The subject of their fights: Tommy himself! All of them were trying to lick his face, shoving others out of the way to get to him as he laughed and petted as many of them as he could. ~~(It helped him ignore the ache in his chest about not being able to participate in these types of activities anymore.)~~

Tommy wasn't sure how long he had been in this strange animal haven, or even where this haven was. He was still quite under the weather, but he didn't feel like he was inches from losing his final life anymore. He knew he had the animals to thank for that. They cared for him and showed him love, something he had been sorely missing since his exile.

It made him feel ever so warm, both emotionally and physically.

Every so often, he felt like he was hearing someone talking. The voices were far too faint, and he never recognized the voices themselves. It wasn't any of his former friends or Dream, and whoever it was never spoke at a volume loud enough to understand. Considering his history with hallucinations, he never gave these mystery sounds much thought.

Instead, Tommy spent his days curled up in his nest of blankets, resting next to the polar bear who seemed determined to keep him buried in its fur. Sure, he missed his friends and family, but the animals loved him and cared for him when they didn't. The animals wanted him, so he wanted them in return.

Fundy led the Butcher Army right to Phil's house, an almost manic grin plastered across his face. He was bursting with pride that he had been allowed to lead this mission. Finally, he was going to make a name for himself. Finally, he was going to get the recognition he deserved.

~~He pointedly ignored the little voice in his head reminding him that he was targeting his grandfather. Family ties meant nothing to him after both Wilbur and Phil had abandoned him. They didn't care about him, so why should he care about them? The cabinet, on the other hand, did care about him and he wasn't going to disappoint them.~~

Stepping up on the old man's porch, Fundy rang the doorbell and waited, axe slung over his shoulder as he showed off his bloody apron. He looked intimidating. He looked like someone worthy of recognition.

When the door swung open, Fundy bared his teeth in a mocking smile. "Hey, Phil. Long time no see."

"Fundy?" The old man glanced past him, seeing Tubbo and Quackity flanking him with their own axes out. "What is this? What's going on here?"

"Funny you should ask." Fundy forced his way into the house, already scanning the place. "We're looking for Technoblade. Figured you could tell us where he is, given that you two are so close."

Phil, predictably, turned hostile and got belligerent. He spouted some nonsense about how L'Manberg needed to show *him* that it was worthy of his loyalty, and how Techno was his friend and he wasn't going to rat on him to "people with obviously sinister intentions". Already sick of listening to his "grandfather", Fundy pushed past the man and began to look around.

"Hey," Phil barked out, "what do you think you're doing?"

Fundy stared at him with grim certainty. "My job. Quackity, mind dealing with my Grandfather? He's clearly not gonna cooperate, meaning he's a traitor to the nation."

Quackity gave him an ugly, sinister laugh as he pointed his axe at Phil. "Gladly. Consider yourself lucky that we've got our hands full with the stuck pig you call a friend, otherwise

you'd have a spot on the chopping block right next to him."

Phil squawked at that but could do nothing as he was backed into a corner, held in place by the axe on his throat. This left Fundy and Tubbo free to start searching. They threw open every chest, dumped every barrel, and tore up the floors in search of any hidden stashes. They were in such a frenzy to search that Fundy almost missed it.

The barrel was shoved into the corner of the room, hidden behind his crafting bench and smithing table. Fundy almost ignored it, thinking it was empty at first glance. Then, he saw it. A glint of metal right at the bottom. With a feral grin, he reached in and pulled out a compass. The second he saw the words carved into the back, he knew he'd hit paydirt.

"Hey Big Q!" he called out, waving it in the air and relishing in Phil's panicked reaction.

"Look what I found."

"No..." Phil's face filled with a mixture of horror and rage. "You won't get away with this."

Fundy watched with a sick sense of satisfaction as Tubbo turned to face Phil, tossing an ankle monitor up and down in his hand. "I think we already have."

Ranboo found himself at the site of Tommy's exile once more, staring at the remnants of the shabby encampment that Tommy had been confined to.

The birch fence was already falling apart thanks to the cold winds, and the small, untouched cabin stood only as ruins. Parts of the building were burnt and singed and other parts lay scattered around. Even the ground was scarred, explosion holes everywhere he looked, and he instinctively knew these holes weren't made by creepers. The tent was sagging inward, its fabric ripped in multiple places.

This place made Ranboo's heart ache, thinking about how long his friend had been trapped here, alone and suffering. No one deserved to live like this, especially someone as loyal and loving as Tommy. L'Manberg was the worst for-... No, not just L'Manberg. Everyone on the server had failed Tommy, and Ranboo was done with them.

The enderman hybrid plopped down on the snow-covered beach, having one last thing to do before he could go to Tommy's side. Opening up his memory journal, he began to meticulously copy it into a new journal, writing this one in Enderscript to prevent wandering eyes from reading his notes. He would never betray his friend, even unknowingly through his memory book.

After what was likely several hours, he had finished transcribing his memory journal. Without a second of hesitation, he took out a flint and steel and set fire to his old journal. He watched without blinking as his past burned up before him, feeling no remorse for the path he'd chosen.

After the blaze died down, Ranboo checked to make sure that the book had burned in its entirety. He then stood up and dusted the sand off his suit, feeling somewhat lighter now that

he had done this. All he had to do now was figure out how to get to Tommy. He'd been left to the wayside for long enough, and it was high time someone went to his side.

"Youngling," a voice warbled from behind him, "what brings you back here? Should you not be safe in your settlement with the others?"

Ranboo didn't even jump this time, almost expecting the presence of the elder. Turning to face the other, he stared defiantly at the elder's forehead. *"The settlement that failed the other youngling? I do not trust them with my safety any longer. I am heading out to find my friend red-loud-gold, for he deserves to know that someone will put them first."*

The elder seemed pleased by his declaration. *"Loyalty to your End is always important. Therefore, let me help you on your journey. While I may not know where your friend is personally, I know who does. Allow me to go fetch them."*

With a cloud of purple particles and a *vwoop*, the enderman teleported away. Within a few minutes, two endermen appeared where there had only been one before. This new enderman didn't hesitate to act, latching their claws into Ranboo's suit.

The world twisted around the two and Ranboo found himself on the ground, disoriented. He gasped a bit, trying to get his bearings when a weak yet familiar voice called out to him.

"Ranboo?"

Baba lovingly looked over the golden child curled up against her flank. He was asleep once more, so very trusting and loving as he pressed himself into her fur. It made her feel relieved that the cub could still maintain a level of trust in others even after all he had been through. She would not abuse his trust, keeping her cub safe and protected for as long as he allowed her.

Carl shifted forward from the corner that he was standing in, eyes never leaving the child. *"There's something I've noticed. The child... I think he can understand us. I have seen him react to us when we speak as if he is privy to what we are saying."*

Steve lifted his head in confusion. *"How could he pick up the language? He is not a hybrid, and even if he was, he would only be able to understand others who share his lineage. How could he understand all of us?"*

Bob moved forward, catching the attention of all the animals. *"It is rare for a server to rally against a singular entity like this. No doubt we have garnered the attention of the deities of these realms, and they have seen fit to grant our chosen child the gift of speech."*

Baba smiled down at her cub, excited at the idea that she would be able to communicate with him in the near future.

Dream took a deep breath, straightening up and plastering an expression of cockiness and power on his face. Even under his (~~battered, chipped, barely held together~~) mask, he wanted to make sure that he radiated confidence. After all, if you look like you know what you are doing, no one will call you on it.

Getting Tommy under his control was proving to be more difficult than he had anticipated, but there was still his ace in the hole. Ranboo never failed to obey every order given, and his memory book had proven invaluable at keeping tabs on everything that was going on in the so-called “country” of L’Man-Child-Berg. Perhaps he could even use the kid to get the loudmouthed brat to cooperate.

Strolling along the wooden piers that made up the pathways, it didn't take Dream long to bump into the L'Manberg cabinet, minus one lanky enderman hybrid, the one person who he was looking for. He could feel that pool of dread reforming, but he ignored the feeling. What did he have to be worried about? Ranboo was... probably just out of sight. Or running late.

“Hello there, Tubbo.” Dream made sure to look down at the so-called President, relishing in how the kid squirmed. “Seems your cabinet is short a member today. Ranboo running late or something?”

Quackity snorted and rolled his eyes. "He fucking quit and walked out on us, the coward. We haven't seen him since and honestly, we aren't looking for him."

Dream's eye twitched before he felt the world spinning. He watched distantly as the world tilted, Tubbo's face filling with confusion and concern as the admin passed out.

Chapter End Notes

Two updates today. If you aren't already reading my Pirate AU, you definitely should.

I'm likely not to update this til after the new year as I'm working on some other projects (which I am very excited about) that I hope to have done by New Year's Eve/Day. (Although if I finish them in time, I might manage to get out another chapter before the end of the year.)

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

It's the Butcher Army's time to shine (what could go wrong?)

Chapter Notes

So, uh, whoops? Sorry about the long break since my last upload. Writing this felt easier so the break was probably a good thing, even though it was unplanned. The two things I've promised are on the horizon and now that I'm back at college, my schedule's controlled chaos, not the chaos of breaks so uploads should return to their usual every-other-Sunday pattern.

Thanks for all the lovely support as always.

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ghostbur hummed to himself as he floated above the snow, following after his new friend, a blue sheep he'd named Friend. Friend was a funny ewe, one that seemed to have decided that he needed a friend, and needed to go on a trip. He was already on a trip for Dream, so he decided to let Friend take him on a new one. So far, they'd had so much fun.

The blue sheep was trotting along at a fast clip in the direction of Techno's house, which made the ghost so very happy. He hadn't seen Techno in a long time and was eager to visit him. ~~(He felt like there was someone else he missed, but the name just wouldn't come to him. Who was he missing?)~~

The trees parted to reveal the large clearing where Techno's cottage was set up. Light spilled across the snow through the windows, making Ghostbur smile at the sight. However, he was puzzled by the direction that Friend was going. He wanted to show off his new companion to Techno but Friend had left him to head towards the barn.

Ghostbur shrugged off his confusion and continued to Techno's place, phasing right through the door as he looked around. The cabin was in a state of disarray, with items strewn about the place, cupboards opened, and drawers left hanging. The hybrid himself was equipping himself like he was readying for war, strapping on his armour and gathering his weapons while standing next to a brewing stand that bubbled away.

"Hi, Techno!" Ghostbur cheered.

Technoblade stiffened and turned around to face him, looking ready to kill. Ghostbur didn't even blink at the sword that passed right through him, watching as his brother untensed some.

"Ghostbur now is not the time." Techno sheathed his weapons and turned back to the brewing stand. "I'm a bit busy and I need to focus."

Ghostbur cocked his head, not liking how stressed the hybrid looked. He held out some blue as he looked around. "What's going on? Why are you stressed?"

Techno turned back to him, eyes wild with fear, stress, and all the negative emotions the amnesiac ghost preferred to forget (and often did). "There's an army, Ghostbur! L'Manberg is sending an army to kill me! They're coming to kill me, and they have my compass, and they did something to Phil, and-!"

"Kill you?" That made Ghostbur frown. "Why? That doesn't sound very nice. Maybe you heard wrong?"

Technoblade stared at him for a second before moving back to his brewing. "No Ghostbur, I didn't hear wrong. Phil messaged me, telling me they were coming. They want to execute me, and I refuse to let that happen."

Frowning, Ghostbur drifted closer. "But why would they want to do that?"

Technoblade didn't get a chance to respond before a knock at the door drew his attention.

Friend was more than a little worried about the state of her ghostly companion, the shattered remnants of the golden lamb's brother. She'd found him wandering alone in the woods and had decided to try and help him, to see if there was anything salvageable in this ghost. So far, her efforts seemed to be in vain.

The ghost, who called himself Ghostbur, was ditzy, cheerful, and easily forgetful. Any memory he had that was even remotely sad was forgotten within a second of forming. This habit also gave him a rather unfortunate inability to focus on the important things in life. Friend couldn't hold it against him, even if she still judged him a bit.

She held those failures more as signs that the people surrounding Ghostbur were inadequate and thus failed him. He at least *tried* to help the golden lamb, trying to provide him with what the green monster took away. He tried, and that was enough to make Friend put in the effort to try and salvage him.

Leaving the ghost to speak to his hybrid companion in the house, Friend turned her focus to the barn. The door was slightly ajar, and she happily took the invitation, carefully entering the warmth of the den. None of its occupants bothered her, the sea of dogs parting slightly so she could approach the centre of the barn, and the cherished being resting there.

There, lying on a bundle of blankets, was the little golden lamb. Though he may have been larger than her, he was still young and needed protection from the horrors that he had faced. He had protected himself long enough, a duty that never should have fallen on the shoulders of a lamb so young. Now, Friend would do her part to keep the lamb safe.

She had just settled in to offer her wool as warmth for the lamb when everything shifted, and a new hybrid appeared in the barn.

Ranboo stared at Tommy, seeing the boy leaning against a polar bear, covered in dogs and a random blue sheep. His friend seemed just as shocked to see him, staring right back at him while pointedly avoiding eye contact.

"H-Hey Tommy..." Offering a nervous wave, Ranboo lowered himself to the floor, wringing his hands as he did.

"What..." Prime Tommy's voice sounded awful. He was so *quiet*. "What are you doing here?"

Ranboo twisted his fingers harder, dropping his gaze to the ground. "Well... I was worried about you. You just... vanished and I thought you..." He grimaced, turning away. "I thought you were dead because you were so sick when I last saw you and nobody else noticed, much less cared."

The enderman *hated* how Tommy just seemed resigned to that fact as if he had gotten used to being abandoned and left behind. It made him want to cry.

"I... I couldn't let that stand, so when an enderman found me, I talked to them, and then suddenly I was here, so...uh... yeah," he finished lamely.

Tommy stared silently at Ranboo for so long that the hybrid started to squirm under the weight of his gaze. Finally, something seemed to click in Tommy's brain and the enderman hybrid found a weak hand grasping at his sleeve. Without hesitation, Ranboo let himself get pulled closer, allowing Tommy to cling to him in a tight, desperate hug. Tears immediately began to dampen his suit jacket, but he didn't care. It was clear Tommy needed this.

The excessive emotions pouring out of the teen in ragged sobs was more than Ranboo had ever seen from Tommy. In fact, this was the first time the enderman hybrid could think of that he has seen his friend shed a tear. He didn't let that bother him though, just doing his best to comfort his friend. He rubbed his back, albeit awkwardly, trying to ignore the looks the animals were giving him that threatened to send his anxiety skyrocketing.

Before long, Tommy pulled back, wiping the tears off of his face before sending a glare at Ranboo. The lack of heat behind it made it clear that the teen wasn't angry at all. "You're a fucking pussy, boob boy. Why the fuck are you getting so worked up over me? Big Man TommyInnit can take care of himself. You should be back in L'Manberg doing... whatever it is you do."

Ranboo smiled, unphased by the cussing or the heatless insults. Tommy actually sounded like himself for a bit there, even if he knew that the teen was far from alright. "Let's just say that they were making plans I didn't like so I walked out, and they told me never to come back. So, here I am."

Tommy's eyes widened and he looked shocked for all of a second before he returned his usual expression of cocky confidence.

"They...they kicked you out?" There was still a note of anxiety in his voice that he hadn't managed to suppress. "Well, that was stupid of them. Then again, if they were willing to kick out the biggest man, what's to stop them from doing the same to you, Ranboob?"

Ranboo grinned at him. "That's not my name and you know it."

Tommy just shrugged, leaning back against the polar bear behind him. He looked ready to nod off again, fighting a yawn as he nodded at the building slightly. "So what do you think about the new digs?"

Eying the room full of animals, a menagerie that included animals that weren't normally tamable (and seriously, what was up with that random blue sheep?), Ranboo found himself at a loss for words. He didn't know what to make of the place, especially with the animals still staring daggers at him.

"Actually, where are we? Antfrost's animal sanctuary?"

Tommy shrugged and smiled. "Dunno Big R. Seems too small to be the sanctuary, not like I care. Whatever it used to be, it's mine now."

"Do you mind if I go peek out the door?"

Tommy flapped a dismissive hand at him, turning to snuggle into the polar bear as he slowly lost his battle with consciousness. "Go right ahead..."

Ranboo stood up and strode over to the door, cracking it open before stepping outside...

Quackity felt like the king of Minecraft, everything lining up exactly how he wanted it to go. The Butcher Army had found a compass that led them straight to Technoblade's hideout, had managed to trap Philza under house arrest, and now they were seconds from taking down the Blood God himself. Even better, Dream had offered to join their party, which meant they were back to four against one! A cruel, sadistic grin was plastered on his face as he banged on the door, eager to claim the piglin's head.

The door swung open and it took all of Quackity's self-control to not show his fear to the angry hybrid standing before him. Rather than the unprepared, unaware Technoblade he was expecting, the avian was face to face with a kitted-out, pissed-off warrior.

"What. Do. You. *Want*?" the piglin snarled, his face twisted in an ugly sneer.

Tubbo stepped forward. “Your crimes against L’Manburg have gone unpunished for far too long.”

Technoblade scoffed at that, the sneer never fading. “My crimes? Need I remind you that you’re the one who used me to replace one tyrant with another? Also, as I recall, Wilbur’s the one who did most of the damage.”

“I did?” Ghostbur’s voice echoed from the house. “Well, that does sound like what people keep telling me, so it must be true.”

“Enough!” Quackity snapped. “We’re not fucking around here, Technoblade! We’re going to bring you back to L’Manburg and you’re going to come with us. There’s no other way around it.”

Technoblade eyed them as if sizing them up for their coffins before his gaze drifted to Dream. He seemed to linger on the admin a bit longer before speaking up again. “And what’s your stake in all this, Dream? Why are you all chummy with these L’Manberg-?”

“Ranboo?!”

Tubbo's startled shout caused everyone to stop what they were doing, all heads whipping around to find the source of the President’s distress. It appeared to be a massive barn, where Quackity found himself staring at the frozen form of the enderman hybrid standing in the cracked doorway.

“What the fuck?!” Quackity started sputtering. “Is this why you fucking left, Ranboo?! So you could pal around in a fucking *barn*?!”

Next to him, he heard the clacking of Technoblade's armour as the piglin shifted to stare at his barn. “Bruh, why did no one tell me a child was living on my property?”

Ranboo's gaze flicked across the faces of those staring at him. After letting out a very eloquent “uh...” the hybrid turned and ducked back into the barn, the doors slamming shut behind him.

Quackity didn't wait for anyone else to act before marching over to the barn. Placing his hand on the door handle, he was just about to open it when Technoblade spoke up.

“I wouldn't do that if I were you.”

Quackity twisted his head around to send a nasty snarl at the piglin. “Oh? And why is that? Considering the likes of Ranboo are squatting in here, I figure there’s no reason I can’t have a peek.”

With that, he pulled the door open.

Quackity: "Why do I hear boss music?"

Feel free to suggest what you want to see happen in this fic, it might happen.

Comments and Kudos are always appreciated.

See you all in two weeks! (Unless you read my Pirate AU, in which case, I'll be back on Sunday.)

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Quackity opens a door

Chapter Notes

Thank you lot for the lovely support you've been showing!!!

10k hits is utterly absurd, I thought happy face was doing well when it hit 1k, but here we are. And to say that this thing started as a bit of a joke that my bestie encouraged me to write.

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Baba was getting sick and tired of all of these players disrupting her den. The enderman hybrid was annoying, but the cub seemed to like him if his false loudness was anything to go by. And the hybrid did seem to be polite, and a youngling in his own right. So, she let it slide and let him stay. However, the loud, angry voices outside would *not* be granted the same courtesy.

Around her, the other animals prepared to deal with the loud creature preparing to intrude upon their space. She pawed at the ground, sparing her cub a glance as she watched Bob take up her position at his pillow. He didn't have her fur, but the cub loved cows. He was the best choice to watch her cub.

The enderman hybrid saw her eying the door and took a quick step to the side, wisely deciding to remain out of her way. She huffed out in gratitude, tensing her muscles in preparation for her attack as the door swung open...

Ranboo's day just kept getting weirder and weirder. Being teleported into some mystery location: unsettling. Finding Tommy and getting to see his friend doing at least marginally better: so far the only upside to today. An entire barn of animals that seemed to be sizing him up: nerve-wracking. Looking outside to find himself in Technoblade's area, with the Butcher Army and Dream in the midst of a heated argument: more toxic than a radioactive dumpsite.

All in all, Ranboo was not liking the situation he and Tommy were in. Still, it wasn't like there was much he could do. He was unlikely the animals would let him just take Tommy, and even if he did, where would they go? Outside was just about the worst assortment of humans and hybrids, all of whom had shown that they would put themselves and their own interests above those of Tommy. Didn't even care about his health or well-being. All they were concerned with was the protection of the land they held.

Technoblade was probably worse, having destroyed Tommy's home. While Ranboo hadn't been there to see it, he had heard through his former "friends" about how Techno basically disowned his own brother, leaving him alone in the wake of Wilbur's death. Yeah, that hybrid *definitely* wasn't good for Tommy's continued mental health.

And Dream... the admin had abused Tommy, manipulated him, broken him down until he was falling apart at the seams. He convinced the boy that no one cared for him, and that Dream was his only friend. While the first part of that statement had been proven true enough, Ranboo refused to stand by and let this blatant abuse continue.

Still, there was only so much he could do, and nowhere he could go given Tommy's current state. However, an entire barn of wild, angry animals seemed keen on aiding him in his mission, if their cold, dead stares at the door were anything to go by. One of the polar bears even grabbed the hem of his jacket, pulling him behind the mass of animals after he stepped aside. This left him alone with Tommy and a cow, a wall of fur and wool between them and the outside world.

Honestly, he could live with this. Tommy's blanket nest seemed rather soft, and he was tired, cold, and stressed. So, without further ado, he curled up around his friend, pointedly ignoring the sound of the barn doors opening.

Technoblade wondered why a child was living in his barn.

If the child aspect wasn't bad enough, the fact he was (formerly?) part of L'Manberg didn't help matters. Although it seemed like the child didn't seem to realise where he was until that exact moment, which just raised more questions.

Also, if a child was living in his barn, did that mean-?

Orphan

Orphan

Kill the orphan

What are you talking about

Are you mad

The second worst thing to happen to orphans

Technoslay

Technokill

Technogetmurderedbyanimals

I forgot about that

Whoops Get wreck

So not only was the orphan (former??) L'Manbergian child living in his barn, he was also the only one able to enter it without getting absolutely murdered.

Frankly, this was getting confusing, so he shoved the issue of the barn child onto future Techno to figure out. (Honestly, he really should have gotten to the source of the barn drama before, but again, that was a future Techno problem.)

The *current* problem was the moron of a duck hybrid who was just about to sign his own death warrant, along with one for his little ragtag group of friends. He would later deny any concern he held for any of their lives, but he would at least admit that he was more than a little put off by Dream.

While his presence wasn't surprising (he knew how stubborn the man could be, and he knew that he wasn't gonna drop the whole Tommy thing no matter how much he protested), the Admin's current state was. He somehow looked worse than before, clothes threadbare and filthy, mask held together with what looked like old honey. He was gaunt, pale, and greasy, his entire body seemingly radiating exhaustion and the alertness of someone who was expecting a sneak attack from his own shadow.

He *really* wasn't gonna like what happened when Quackity opened that damned door, and Techno got the idea that Dream already knew that.

Quackity grinned as he swung the door open, ready to lay into Ranboo and maybe get his hand on an animal to take hostage. If the pet wars taught him anything, animals made great bargaining chips. However, that smile immediately dropped when he saw what he was facing on the other side. After all, no man, not even Dream himself, could stand a chance against a raging mama polar bear.

Now there were other animals following the polar bear, but the avian was a little more concerned with the giant one at the front. The secondary polar bear behind the first was also quite concerning but not as bad, as he didn't look quite as angry and wasn't charging at him.

Quackity was quickly relieved to discover he was not the main target of the polar bear's attack. She knocked him down on her way to greater enemies. Sure it hurt when she and the rest of her compatriots stampeded over him, but he survived the encounter and that was honestly more than he was expecting when he saw her.

However, the blue sheep that followed the party pulled a bit of a dickish move when she stepped between his legs with quite a bit of force, using violence to express her displeasure with him.

Dream couldn't believe things kept getting worse. He was already scraping the bottom of the barrel when it came to luck, so how did he keep managing to sink even lower?!

Today was supposed to be the day things got back on track. He was going to use Ranboo to get to Tommy, then he was going to use the Butcher Army to get Techno under his thumb. If the Blood God owed him his life, then Dream would *own* him. That's how today was *supposed* to go.

Instead, he found Ranboo had vanished, forcing him to go along with the Butcher Army to try and salvage things. From there, he was horrified to see that this so-called "army" didn't even have a plan! And then! Then that *stupid, stupid* duck hybrid ended up opening that damned barn door, unleashing the very same polar bear that had nearly mauled Dream not too long ago.

At this point, the admin felt more depressed than surprised by the situation. Of *course*, the bear made a beeline for him, murder in her eyes. Of *course*, she was followed by an entire menagerie of animals that were keen on taking his head. Of *course*, the last of his weapons and tools had broken following his last failed attempt at material gathering, leaving him utterly defenceless.

Frankly, Dream was more than a little relieved to sink into blackness for the second time today, knowing from experience that he was merely unconscious and not dead. He could only pray that when he opened his eyes again, the world wouldn't somehow be even *worse*.

~~(He knew it would be.)~~

Chapter End Notes

Baba: *ready to murder*

Ranboo: "sounds like fun but I wanna nap"

Baba: *curb stomping both Dream and Quackity*

Technoblade: "was someone going to tell me that there is an orphan child living in my stable or was I supposed to learn that myself when I saw him walk out of it?"

So since it is break week, there should be another chapter of this next weekend, along with an update of my Pirate AU

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Techno has an unpleasant realisation

Chapter Notes

Everyone's comments last chapter were the best and I'm so glad you are enjoying this as much as I am.

Was this supposed to come out on Sunday, yes, however, delay a day for present for my bestie's bday sounded better to me.

The real apology goes to my spellchecker because I apparently flipflop between American and British spellings and it hates me for it.

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Techno would like to know which god he upset because there was no other explanation for this situation. He was never one to apologise to anyone, but there was also a child in his barn, and apologising to some pissed-off deity would honestly be easier to deal with.

Despite all this, the hybrid couldn't help the smile that tugged at his lips as he watched the disaster zone in front of him. Quackity had still not recovered from what that blue sheep had done to him. (Even *he* had winced in sympathy.) Tubbo and Fundy had been herded off to the side by at least a dozen of his dog army, helpless to do anything as they were dive bombed by Philza's crows.

Baba, in an unsurprising move, had legged it towards Dream and did not appear to be swayed by the admin's dip into unconsciousness. Instead, she stood over the prone man as Edward teleported right onto her back. Much to Technoblade's shock, (and a level of unholy glee,) the enderman proceeded to drop a block of sand right on the man's face. He watched it shatter and bury the admin, spitting purple particles at Dream before teleporting away.

Recovering from *that* little scene, Techno surveyed the wreckage of his front lawn. (His poor property value. Honestly, no respect.) Realising most of his animals were currently occupied, including the main aggressor, he decided that it was high time he discovered what in Prime's name was happening in his barn.

He wanted a second pair of eyes for this, so he gestured for Ghostbur to follow quietly. (With how scatterbrained his brother's ghost was these days, he could only hope that he could manage that much.) Techno then walked over to the barn door, still left open after Baba charged out. Quackity was still singing falsetto in the snow, too distracted to do anything, so he stepped through the doorway unhindered.

Idiot

Idiot

Technoidiot

Please tell me someone has popcorn

This is going to be hysterical

LOL

Fs in chat everyone

F

F

F

E

That's a really deformed F, you absolute moron

As it turned out, Techno's assessment of Baba having a cub had been half right. However, instead of a tiny polar bear cub curled up in the blanket nest, it was Tommy! (~~Little runt~~ ~~Theseus!~~) That shouldn't have been possible, but there he was, curled up next to Bob and the enderman hybrid in that blanket nest.

He was far too startled by this discovery to notice the dawning horror on Ghostbur's face. When the ghost gasped, Techno turned to face him.

"What's the matter Ghostbur? Do ya need some blue?" He kept his voice gentle to avoid upsetting the ghost even if he didn't want to turn away from the real issue at hand. (Honestly, he gets kicked out of his barn for like a fortnight and suddenly children are living in it?)

The ghost didn't even bother to respond before hovering over to Tommy, reaching his hand out but stopping short of actually resting it on his cheek. "Look..."

Techno refocused on the boy (~~his sounder, his runt, his brother, his...~~) and saw what had caused Ghostbur to get upset. Tommy's once flawless, freckled skin was now mottled with burns and stretched so thinly over his gaunt frame. There were dozens of cuts covering the little exposed skin there was, all the same bright pink of newly formed scar tissue.

It was too late for any kind of treatment, not that the boy ever received any. Each and every wound, no matter how fresh, had clearly been left to fester without any type of aid. Even worse, many of them were fresh, not leftovers from Wilbur's TNT trap or Techno's withers. They looked... they looked like the boy (~~his runt, a runt, an innocent, helpless runt~~) had been tortured.

This was upsetting on multiple levels. Who could have done this? *Why* would anyone do this? Why would Tommy not do something about it? Why did he let his wounds fester? Why did he look so skinny? Why was Tommy not eating? He knew how to forage and was no stranger to stealing what he needed to survive. So why... why...

A growl emitted from the normally peaceful ghost while he was moving the blankets, trying to tuck Tommy in and warm him up. It was such an alien sound, blue practically pouring out of Ghostbur's eyes, mouth, and chest wound as he stared at the sleeping child. Techno strode over and crouched down at his side, immediately recoiling at what he saw.

There, on the back of Tommy's neck, slightly obscured by the green bandanna the teen always wore, was a scarred smiley face. The lines were rough and deep like someone *wanted* it to scar. (Like someone held him down and dug the blade in, probably taking their sweet time as ~~his runt~~ Tommy screamed.)

Another growl started up, this one coming from Technoblade himself. He knew who did this... the bastard had all but confessed when he came knocking before, demanding Tommy like... like he *owned* the boy. It explained why Baba had immediately tried to kill him, why Edward had clearly gone out of his way to find a sand block to torment the admin with. All of the animals shared a grudge against Dream for what he did to Tommy, and now Techno was ready to take it on as well.

Taking one last look at ~~(baby brother, precious runt, sounder)~~ Tommy, Techno stood up and marched out of the barn, cape billowing behind him and leaving Ghostbur to keep an eye on the sleeping teen. He no longer cared about Ranboo, or that he and Tommy were on the outs. No, all he cared about was the monster who hurt his kin, and the blood the Voices were demanding.

Stepping in front of Baba, the piglin warrior hauled Dream up by the collar of his hoodie, shaking him hard.

"Wake *up*," he snarled, his voice more of a growl than words. When he saw the green of Dream's eyes, he growled ferally. "You're going to tell me what you did to Tommy, and if you *dare* to lie to me, I will carve out every last one of your teeth with my fucking *pickaxe*!"

Chapter End Notes

Have I been on an SBI kick recently? Yes and it shows

So thoughts on an SBI redemption arc? (Don't worry, Ma- *cough* Baba will make them fight for just visitation rights to her new cub, she's going to put them through their paces for even that much)

Also, Revivebur (but more mentally stable), yea or nay?

Hope you had a happy birthday, thelordofshrimp *hug* I miss you <3

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

The aftermath of exile begins to unfold

Chapter Notes

Hello everybody, sorry for the delay (I have been sick for ages so whoops).

Say hi to my new beta (and soundboard), Author_of_Insanity101.

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Technoblade had never felt this much rage at once, especially not at a single person. His blood was literally boiling and he felt like he was seeing red, hands shaking from anger as he continued to hold Dream aloft. Behind him, Baba's gaze never left his captive, teeth bared and claws digging into the snowy ground.

Dream thrashed weakly in his grasp, his mask askew and revealing his face, He looked terrified and flustered, but tried to hide it behind a cocky smile. It failed, miserably.

"What are you going on about, Techno? I haven't done anything to anyone."

Techno and Baba snarled in unison and Techno turned to eye the polar bear, only to find the favour returned. He only eyed Baba for a moment before turning back to *his prey* Dream.

BLOOD FOR THE BLOOD GOD!

Kick his ass

He's fucked

Liar

"Do I look stupid to you, Dream?" Techno leaned forward, just enough to emphasise the sharp tusks that jutted from his mouth. "You barged onto my property days ago, demanding I hand over Tommy and acting like he was some sort of toy. And now you're trying to act like nothing happened? I'm not some idiotic groupie you can twist with your words."

Dream's voice didn't even quiver (Techno had to give him credit for that) when he responded. "I'm telling you, I haven't done anything to anyone. Tommy... c'mon, let's face it, he needs to be disciplined. That's the entire reason he was exiled. When he ran away, I got worried.

Not just for him, but for the server as a whole. As Tommy's friend, it's my job to keep him on the straight and narrow, and that's all I've been trying to do."

Technoblade could only blink, stunned by the amount of bullshit that Dream was spewing.

"Just what sort of 'friendship' involves starving and *torturing* a fucking kid?!" He shook Dream again. "That's not friendship, that's abuse!"

Dream scoffed, rolling his eyes. Techno wanted to gouge them out with a dull spoon. "Tommy's a kid and a stupid one that doesn't know when to leave well enough alone. Everything that happened to him was his own fault, no matter what he's told you."

"He didn't tell me anything." Techno could barely get the words out. "His body is covered in burns and scars, he looks like he hasn't had a proper meal in weeks, and he had *your fucking smile carved into his neck!!*"

There was a quiet gasp from where Tubbo and Fundy were corralled, but he ignored them. They didn't matter. The piece of filth in his hand that still had that stupid fake smile plastered on his face was the main target, and Techno was far from done with him.

"You're going to tell me *exactly* what you did to my baby brother. Try to lie to me again, and-"

His threat was cut off by a chuckle escaping Dream's mouth, a chuckle that soon devolved into a loud, maniacal cackle. He wasn't even trying to escape from Techno's grasp anymore, and when he met the piglin's eye, his gaze was that of a madman. Seems the admin was done pretending.

"Guess I can't pull the wool over your eyes, Technoblade." Dream scoffed, sounding like he was the one in control. "Well, whatever. You wanna know the truth? Fine. TommyInnit is a nuisance and a pest. He's the worst thing to happen to *my* server, and I decided enough was enough."

Techno shuddered at the coldness in Dream's voice, and the possessive edge he added to the word *my*. "God-complex much?"

"I *am* a God, Technoblade!" Dream threw his arms out wide, gesturing to the server as a whole. "I own everything here! Every block, every build, every mob," his grin turned downright sinister, "every player."

"Fuck..." a voice from far in the distance let out. Techno didn't even bother looking to see who it was.

"Then Theseus..." he let out, blood roaring in his ears as his rage began to boil over.

"He's so close to being my perfect little doll," Dream cooed, his voice dripping with so much condescending sweetness. "He was *listening*. He was *quiet*. He was everything I could have ever asked for in a pawn. Then he had to go and *ruin it* by leaving. But now..." that manic

look was back in full force. “Now I can take him back where he belongs. I can finish my work and mould him into a model citizen of *my* SMP.”

Techno saw red. Lifting Dream higher in the air, he shook him about like a ragdoll. “Do you even *hear* yourself?! You’re talking about a child! You’re talking about torturing and manipulating a literal child!! How-?! What the fuck is wrong with you?!”

Techno was panting hard as he screamed at the monster in his grasp, the voices continuing to demand blood and vengeance. He was seconds from going through with these demands when Dream grabbed his wrist and started talking. Not in a move to lessen his fate, but in a deluded desire to explain what Dream had done and why.

Every scar, every burn, every time that Dream had weaponized his words, every time Dream had used Tommy against himself, it all came spilling out in an excited rush from a man who was sickeningly proud of what he had done.

It was the final nail in the Admin’s coffin. The last of Techno’s self-control shattered like cheap glass and he hurtled Dream into the nearest tree. It creaked loudly from the hit, leaving the man in the snow, utterly winded and unmoving. He wasn’t dead, but that would be a short-lived thing. Techno waved his hand forward, looking right at Baba.

“He’s all yours,” he declared, not looking away as the polar bear took her righteous anger out on the runt defiler.

Within minutes, Dream’s screams of terror were abruptly cut off, and blood seeped into the snow several feet in every direction. Techno was covered in viscera, wanting to look the monster in the eye as he breathed his last.

No one touched his sounder. *No one.*

Ghostbur couldn’t take his eyes off Tommy, an unfamiliar feeling welling inside of him as his gaze trailed along the roadmap of scars and burns on his baby brother’s skin. This wasn’t right, not at all. Tommy wasn’t supposed to be this damaged. And why was he sleeping like this? Tommy was supposed to be loud and active, running everywhere. They were on vacation! So why... why did he look so... wrong?

Blue was leaking out of him badly, drops falling all over Tommy. Ghostbur did his best not to get any on his brother’s skin, though more than a little stained the boy’s hair as he tried to comfort him. He wanted Tommy to get better, to go back to being the right way again, and Blue couldn’t do that.

For the first time since becoming a ghost, Wilbur refused to forget. His brother didn’t deserve to be forgotten. Not like this. Somehow, he would remember. No matter how much it hurt, he would not let himself forget.

A bleat from Friend drew Ghostbur’s attention, making the spirit turn to his sheep companion. She was standing by the doorway, clearly indicating that it was time to go.

Ghostbur didn't want to leave Tommy, but he also knew he couldn't do much. So, with a heavy heart, he floated over to the door, pausing to glance back at Tommy before following after Friend.

"What sort of monster could do such a thing, especially to Tommy?"

Friend looked back at him, giving him that complicated look that some of the others gave him. It made him feel like he was being tested.

"You care for the golden lamb."

"Of course I do!" Ghostbur hated the idea that Friend thought they didn't. "Someone hurt my little brother and I missed it. What if I saw it and forgot? What sort of failure am I?"

Ghostbur ran his hands through his hair in his worry. Friend baa-ed at him again, taking hold of his sweater in her teeth before pulling him along.

"Your mind was not equipped to handle the truth of the situation, though you still tried your best to help the lamb. It wasn't enough, but it was more than any of the other elders did for him."

"I did?" Ghostbur let that assurance calm him somewhat, pulling himself out of his funk and floating higher, smiling once more. "Well then, this time I'll need to make sure to do more. Maybe I could start with a stuffed animal. Tommy didn't have one, and I think he really needs one. Oh! A cow! He likes cows!"

Friend seemed happy with his decision, baa-ing in agreement with his words and nodding. *"It seems there was something worth salvaging in your spirit after all."*

Tommy didn't remember falling back asleep, but that didn't mean he wasn't annoyed by all the loudness going on outside. He shifted in his blankets, groaning as he peered out of the nest, seeking out the source of his frustrations.

To his surprise, Ranboo was curled up next to him, long limbs wrapped awkwardly around him in some weird enderman version of a hug. The sight made him smile (though only because no one was around to call him on it), knowing that Ranboo's arrival hadn't been another hallucination. For the first time ever, someone had come for *him*, had picked *him*. The best part was it was Ranboo, who had actually come to visit him, who had at least pretended to care about him during Exile.

Still, he hesitated, his smile shrinking as he wondered if this was just some elaborate joke. He dreaded the idea that everything that had happened was designed to mock him for being weak enough to need another person in his life.

"You're so selfish," the mini-Dream whispered in his mind. *"You had me as a friend. Why on earth do you need another? Am I not enough for you?"*

While the voice in his head ripped into him, Tommy reached up and started pulling on his hair. However, before he was able to more than give it a few tugs (noticing absent-mindedly that the edges were now blue), a head nudged his hands, causing Tommy to loosen his grip.

Turning to face whatever had just interrupted him, he found himself face-to-face with a cow. Unconsciously, he began to smile. Reaching forward, he carefully looked at the tag the cow wore.

"Bob, huh?"

He stretched his hand out, hovering it above the cow's muzzle, allowing Bob to decide if they wanted to get a pet or not. Without a moment's hesitation, the cow leaned forward into Tommy's hand, prompting a coo from the boy that he didn't even bother to try and suppress.

"Who's the poggest cow? You are, aren't you, Big B?"

Tommy patted Bob gently, scratching behind the ears and along the chin. Bob, clearly enjoying the affection, returned the favour and licked Tommy's face, prompting sputtering from the boy as he tried to wipe the saliva off his face while giggling.

Sadly, Tommy's limited energy reserves quickly ran dry and the boy was forced to lie back down. He rested his head against Bob's flank, allowing Ranboo to curl around him once more. The two warm bodies made him feel safe, and sleep happily reclaimed him.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all so much for your comments and kudos, I really appreciate it and it means a lot to me.

My current listen is the new Sabaton album, which rocks by the way, so check it out.

See you all in two weeks (hopefully).

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Fundy and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day ft. Techno getting smacked down by Baba via Ranboo.

Chapter Notes

Another shout-out to my wonderful beta and ideas person, Author_Of_Insanity101, whose's been such a lovely help.

Thank you lot for your wonderful comments and kudos, I love you all so much <3.

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Look, Fundy knew the odds were stacked against them even before they set off on the mission to capture Technoblade. Quackity thought that their numbers would be enough to give them the advantage but Fundy knew better. Losing Ranboo was a blow to their limited chance of success, no matter how halfhearted the hybrid was when it came to combat. Even the addition of Dream to the Butcher's Army did little to calm the fox's worries.

He walked to the arctic fully expecting the whole group to be slaughtered for daring to challenge the Blood God. What he did *not* expect was what actually went down.

First, Ranboo stepped out of the barn, just as surprised to see them as they were to see him. Even Technoblade expressed confusion over his presence, which just set off an array of alarm bells in his head. Instincts were screaming at him that there was more going on than what he could see, and it had something to do with the barn.

This was only proven when Quackity so stupidly ignored Techno's warning and threw open the doors. Truly he deserved that sheep crushing his bits.

Fundy counted his lucky stars that the animals didn't seem to think he or Tubbo were major threats. While dogs and birds did go after them, it was mostly to corral them into a corner between the house and Technoblade's bee farm. It took Fundy a bit to realise that they were being kept out of the way while the animals went after their true target: Dream.

Shockingly, this animalistic assault wasn't even the highlight of this entire shitshow. The *real* action played out after Technoblade went to investigate his barn. Whatever he found in there enraged him so much that he completely ignored the *angry, murderous polar bear* and grabbed Dream. Uncaring of the fact that the man had passed out (Fundy was only mildly concerned about the admin's inability to retain consciousness), Technoblade shook him like a rag doll before demanding answers. About *Tommy!*

The things Dream admitted to... the laundry list of abuse and manipulation he heaped on Tommy... the shameless declarations of his believed superiority... made Fundy feel genuinely sick.

The gory scene that followed Technoblade essentially feeding Dream to the angry polar bear was what tipped him over the edge. His "bloody" apron (it was never blood. Just red paint to make them all look intimidating) was covered in bits of the disgusting admin, which he did his best to ignore as he tried to shield Tubbo's eyes. President or not, he was a kid and had no business witnessing this horror movie-worthy scene.

Technoblade turned to face them, drenched in the sticky red that was all that remained of Dream. For one terrifying moment, Fundy was convinced that they were about to be the polar bear's next victims. However, the piglin just looked done, a haunted look in his eye that reminded him of how (~~Dad~~) Wilbur looked after the election. Slowly, the Butcher Army's prey lifted a single hand, pointing in the direction of L'Manberg.

"Leave."

Fundy didn't even hesitate. The second the dogs parted for him, the fox grabbed Tubbo by his shoulders, dragging the silent teen over to the collapsed form of Quackity. The avian was still shaking in pain and didn't hesitate to let Fundy drag him to his feet. Then, before either of his two governmental associates could object, he took them both by the wrist and started the long journey back to L'Manberg.

Their plan failed, was doomed to fail from the beginning. The fact that Techno was satisfied with Dream's death was a miracle that was unlikely to stick around, so Fundy had no plans to either. He still had all three Canon lives and he was *quite* happy to keep them.

It was a long walk back to L'Manberg, but compared to the alternative, he took it.

Techno dumped a bucket of water on the red polar bear, doing his best to clean her bloody fur. She was being oddly cooperative after days of chasing him off, but the piglin figured it was mostly due to her current appearance. Not only could the rather excessive amount of blood and viscera scare Tommy, but it also posed a risk to his health in the unwell state he was in.

Thus did Techno find himself in a change of clothes, giving a bath to the polar bear who had just gutted one of the strongest and, Techno noted, most batshit players on the server.

Dumping another bucket over Baba, Techno scrubbed at her fur as he thought through his options. He knew that Dream still had two canon lives left after what happened, meaning he would most likely be back. The second that thought crossed his mind, he winced as the noise in his head reached a fever pitch.

Kill the Teletubby

Blood for the Blood God

Get him

What about Tommy

E

Runt runt runt

Don't leave the baby

Runt needs help

Baby

E

Blood for the Blood God

"Chat, shut up, you aren't being helpful." He rubbed his head, exhaling through his nose as he closed his eyes. "Dream's a problem, yes, but Tommy's the main concern here."

Baba rumbled at him, distracting him slightly from his thoughts. He threw one last bucket of water over her, happy to see that she was back to being her proper white colour. He chucked the bucket back into his inventory before leaning against a tree. He tapped his chin, making a list in his head.

"First, we get him inside. I'll stoke the fire, find any blankets that the animals haven't taken and get him bundled up. From there, potions, food, better clothes, and gear."

He turned back towards his cabin, taking his attention off of the active threat beside him. Before he made it two steps, he pitched forward, falling face-first into the snow. Letting out a startled "Heh?" he lifted his head, trying to figure out what happened.

The low growl emanating from beside him caused him to tense, freezing in place as pieces began to click together. Turning his head ever-so-slowly, Techno was confronted by the unpleasant sight of an angry polar bear standing over him.

"Bruh, what is your problem? I literally just bathed you, what else do you need from me?"

Clearly, this was the wrong thing to say as Baba roared at him, snorting in a derogatory manner. Behind him, there was the sound of the barn door opening, and footsteps began to approach. Techno rolled onto his back, looking back to see Ranboo being herded over to him by Steve. At the same time, Edward appeared on the stairs to his cabin, watching everything unfold.

Upon reaching him, the two-toned enderman looked him up and down, looking amused and annoyed at the same time. Techno sat up as best he could, staring down this tall child that had decided to live in his barn.

"Well, we finally meet face to face. Ranboo, right? Mind telling me what's going on here since you're *clearly* welcome in *my barn* when I've been so rudely kicked out."

The teenager's amusement withered away, the annoyance rising to the forefront of their expression. Baba seemed to share the sentiment, looming over Techno as she huffed and stomped, turning her head towards Edward. In response, Edward tilted his head before warbling at the hybrid child in some whacked version of Telephone.

"Why me..." he heard the teenager mumble before straightening up and taking a deep breath. "So, let me preface this by saying I don't want to be here, or be acting as a mouthpiece for this mess. However, Baba and the elder want me to tell you that you're not welcome anywhere near Tommy. He's not your concern anymore."

"Heh?!" This declaration baffled Technoblade. How could this twig-like hybrid think he could tell *him* that he wasn't welcome *in his own barn*?! "Not my concern? Not Welcome? Kid, you are on *my* property, living in *my* barn, trying to keep me from *my* brother."

Edward spat at that as Baba roared again, and Ranboo winced a bit before continuing. "The elder says that the barn isn't yours anymore and that none of the animals will obey you. And Baba here says that the only reason she's giving you the courtesy of a warning is that you let her deal with, and I quote, the green monster."

Techno snorted, unamused by the path of the conversation. "Look, we've had our rough patches, but Tommy is my sounder. He's my little brother, and I'm going to take care of him. You all have done a good job so far, but I'm here now. So-"

"So nothing," Ranboo cut him off, crossing his arms and glaring at the piglin's snout. "You blew up his home, you abandoned him after his other brother died, and the only reason you care now is that you feel guilty and you want to make yourself feel better."

"That's not-!"

"Save it." The irate teen turned away from him, walking back to the barn. "You had your chance, and you failed. Tommy deserves someone who will put him first, and that's us. You wanna help? You can deliver food and medicine. Other than that, stay away from Tommy. This is your only warning."

Edward and Baba followed the child into the barn, letting the door slam shut behind them, leaving Techno alone, lying in the snow.

Chapter End Notes

Things that have happened since I posted the last chapter in no particular order:
Went back home
Finished my semester
Sprained my ankle

Completed two 500+ piece puzzles
Knit for far too many hours

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Things start falling apart for Dream + Tommy's awake (but not for long)

Chapter Notes

Shout out to my wonderful beta Author_Of_Insanity101 who also pitched in to help write a portion of the chapter. I'll find myself out of work soon enough /j.

I love all your comments and kudos greatly so thank you all!

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo remembered nothing of the walk back to L'Manberg. His brain had gone white after he heard Dream's sickening confession about what he'd done to Tommy. The words played over and over in his mind, background noise to the image of his best friend being dragged away from his home.

And it was all his fault.

He'd let Dream convince him to exile Tommy, to hand over his best friend to be tortured and abused all alone. Not once did he even think to go and check on his friend, someone who was like a brother to him. He just listened to Dream and let Tommy suffer.

No wonder Tommy went and hid with an enemy of L'Manberg. The country (Tubbo) had proven that he wasn't needed. Wasn't *wanted*.

As he finally managed to pull himself back to reality, he found himself staring blankly at the table of the Butcher Army meeting room. The white noise that had filled his ears slowly began to give, making way for angry shouting, most of it from Quackity.

"-fault. We had a plan to keep Tommy in L'Manberg, to fight back against Dream! But you went and undermined us! You let him just drag Tommy right out of L'Manberg! You never even went to check on him and-"

Tubbo lifted his head at that accusation and quietly said, "Well, neither did you two."

Silence fell on the meeting room at that, Quackity open-mouthed and gaping at Tubbo's "audacity." Fundy just looked pale and drained, sitting quietly in his chair as he questioned his life choices.

Looking between the two, Tubbo came to the quick realisation that he did not have the mental energy to deal with them.

Wordlessly, the teenage president stood up, removed his apron, and walked out of the meeting hall. His mind was a jumbled mess of Dream's accusations, Tommy's look of betrayal when Tubbo exiled him, and how the compass hanging around his neck felt like it weighed a ton. He needed to fix this. (He knew that there was no fixing this) He had to do something! (What could he do?) He needed to-

His thoughts were violently cut off by a taloned hand grabbing him by his throat, slamming him into the wall of the nearest building. He choked as he hit the wooden walls, grunting as he gripped the wrist holding him, meeting the eye of his attacker.

He wasn't surprised when he found himself meeting the cold, hate-filled eyes of the Angel of Death, Philza Minecraft himself. The man was dishevelled, his hat hanging around his neck and his hair a windswept mess. Black wings, damaged as they were, bristled behind the man, and if he had had fangs, Tubbo was sure they would have been bared.

"What. Did. You. Do. To. My. Son?!"

Tubbo really, *really* wanted to know which god he had pissed off in a past life that *this* was his punishment.

Still, this was far from an unexpected outcome. A quick glance at Phil's leg revealed a lack of an ankle monitor, meaning he had slipped house arrest. That meant he had likely followed them... meaning that he had heard everything. Still, Tubbo wasn't about to shoulder the entire burden of this entire fiasco. He made his mistakes, but so had everyone else.

"Don't act blameless, Philza..." he growled out, refusing to back down in the face of the angry Elytrian. "I'm not the only one who failed Tommy."

A sense of grim satisfaction filled the young President as Phil's wings stiffened. Yeah, it stung when you were forced to face the truth, doesn't it old man? Sadly, the man quickly recovered his wits and his rage returned.

"You're the one who exiled him. You turned your back on your so-called best friend and-"

"And you're his father," Tubbo interjected, his voice low and steady. "Tell me, between the two of us, who had less room to talk when it comes to Tommy?"

Freezing once again, Phil stumbled back, finally releasing Tubbo. The young goat dropped to his feet, rubbing his throat as he took several deep breaths. His hands were shaking, but he tightened them into fists. Now was not the time to lose his temper.

He glanced over at Phil, who was starting to look closer to his actual age. “So what now? Where do we go from here?”

With grim determination, Tubbo pulled his communicator out of his pocket. "We'll start where it will hurt Dream the most... we'll turn his entire server against him."

The boy typed away for a good minute, then hit send with an air of finality. Phil felt his comm buzz and he pulled it out, glancing briefly at the message.

[Tubbo_: This is a message for the entire server. Dream has confessed to the torture of Tommyinnit since the start of his exile. He admitted to everything and made it clear he would do it again, without remorse or hesitation. If you see him, he is to be brought to L'Manberg to face trial and execution.]

The Angel of Death snorted slightly, inclining his head in acknowledgment before stowing his comm once more. “This is a start, but this doesn’t solve anything. Not by a long shot.”

“I know,” Tubbo replied, summoning his sword. “This is just the first step.”

Phil raised an eyebrow. “And what’s step two of your plan?”

Tubbo’s eyes gleamed with murderous intent. "We find, and we kill Dream."

Sapnap stared at his comm in horror, unable to stomach what he was reading. He couldn't believe Dream could ever do such a thing! Dream would never! This had to be some sort of trick! Vengeance from L'Manberg for the whole War of Independence thing! That was the only explanation!

Yet, as he moved to delete the message and push the topic from his mind, he hesitated. A half-forgotten memory of a strange visit to the nether surfaced. He remembered the words of those irate blazes, about how Dream had done something that they held to be irredeemable. He'd brushed them off before, just as he was brushing off Tubbo now.

These two instances... could they be connected? Could... could Dream really have done something like this?

George groaned as the buzzing of his vibrating comm pulled him from his rest. Blearily blinking the sleep from his eyes, he squinted at the bright screen, trying to puzzle out what it said.

He then sat up with a start in the futile hope that the message would say something different if he was fully awake.

However, sitting up didn't change the words on his screen. Tubbo had no love for Dream, George was sure of that, but this... Tubbo was never one to do something like *this* as a prank.

Besides, George realised with some dawning horror, Dream had been acting differently these past few months. He hid his face behind his mask more, he rarely visited, and the way he spoke... it was as if he was above everyone else. If he was honest, George barely recognized Dream anymore...

Unable to properly cope with this onslaught of information, the mushroom-clad man set down his communicator, laid back down, and went right back to sleep. It was an unhealthy coping mechanism, but it's all he had.

Eret sat doing paperwork in their office, a tedious task, but one essential to the successful running of their kingdom. The endless pile of paper beside them was slowly beginning to shrink when their comm buzzed in their pocket. They sighed, wondering if checking the comm would be worth the time it might take. Still, they reasoned that a quick look couldn't hurt and it would get it off their mind.

Reading the message, they discovered, would not be quick, as they found themselves staring in dismay at the screen.

Dream was someone that they held mixed feelings for at the best of times, though much of that was due to actions that Eret themselves took part in. They would always hate themselves a little for turning traitor on L'Manber, but they never fully forgave Dream for pushing them to that point.

However, Eret never thought Dream capable of reaching such lows as Tubbo had just accused him of. And yet, their own manipulation into becoming king, their role as Dream's puppet to be tossed aside when they were no longer of use... made the truth all too clear. Dream *was* capable of such lows... and Tommy had suffered for it.

Still, Eret's hands were full just managing the lands that Dream had granted them and they were sure that Tommy wouldn't want to see them anyway. And thus, Eret steeled their nerves and set the comm to the side.

Honestly, the to-do pile looked taller than it did a minute ago. They ignored the tremble in their hands as they reached for the top sheet.

Bad hummed as he moved around the kitchen, prepping the space to bake some nice treats for his friends. The others often teased him for his love of muffins and other baked goods, but none of them ever turned him down when he offered up his treats.

His baked goods were his way of showing affection, something he struggled with doing more traditionally. Demons were greedy by nature, so giving things away was a sign of ultimate trust and support.

Adding in some mixed nuts and small pieces of chocolate, Bad finished off the batter for the muffins, snagging a handful for himself just for the heck of it. He carefully filled the muffin

trays with the batter before placing them in the oven, wiping his brow in satisfaction. He pulled his comm out of his hoodie to set a timer but stopped when he saw an unread notification. Curious, he opened it.

Bad nearly dropped his communicator in shock, horrified by what he had read.

Tommy swore far too much for Bad's taste, but the demon never hated him. He could not... *would not* wish physical torment on him or anyone for that matter. The idea that Dream... *Prime*, just the idea of his friend doing such a thing to-... to a *child*! He felt like he was going to be sick.

“Oh yes, muffins!” Skeppy’s voice interrupted, the gem golem sauntering into the kitchen. Bad turned to face him, his face ashy and grey. The second his soulmate saw him, Skeppy’s face turned serious. “Bad? Bad, what’s wrong?”

Bad mutely offered the comm in response, which Skeppy took with a concerned look. The words that slipped out of the gem golem's mouth were definitely worthy of one of his signature shouts, but he just couldn’t muster the willpower to yell.

He ended up burning the muffins.

Puffy huffed and sat up from tending to her plants, wiping the sweat from her brow. The sun was beating down on her but she smiled at the progress she had managed over the afternoon.

It was a hot but productive day and her garden looked all the better for it. Still, she felt that she was entitled to retreat to the shade of her home. And so she did, straightening up and popping her back with a pleased groan. She made her way indoors, stopping to grab herself a cool glass of water, hydration not die-dration after all.

While sipping her water, she pulled out her comm, having felt it vibrate with a message. Smiling to herself, she took note that it was from Tubbo. She was fond of the children on the server and was always delighted to see messages from them.

That smile quickly turned into an absolutely horrified expression when she read the message.

Dream, her little duckling... He’d hurt a child, tortured and abused them all in a show of power as part of some delusional act of claiming godhood. Puffy could feel her heart absolutely *shattering* at that, along with the cup of water in her hand.

She stumbled back, clutching her heart as she wept quietly, wondering where she had gone wrong as a parent.

Later, when she pulled herself together, she would set out for L'Manberg to see what the plan of action would be. Until then, she mourned.

Ponk walked around their office, taking stock of their inventory. As the only qualified medical professional on the server, Ponk was almost always busy, and what little spare time they had was spent on making sure they had everything they might need.

Noting down a shortage of mild healing cream, the masked doctor sighed. It soon gave way to a smile as they rolled their shoulders and cracked their knuckles.

They set up shop by their brewing stand, taking care to carefully measure out the ingredients beforehand and starting the flame underneath.

Their comm buzzed, grabbing their attention. They left the message for a second as they started the glistening melons stewing in the awkward potion. As the mixture bubbled over the heat, they turned their attention back to their comm, giving only half a mind to the message, the rest on keeping time.

With a cry, they put out the flame, heedless of the potions they just ruined. They ran over to the door, stopping only to grab their medical bag before charging out the door.

Tommy stirred softly, still finding it weird to wake up warm and with living bodies around him. He still kept expecting to wake up shivering in his tent, alone and forgotten, and every time he didn't, it made him feel a little bit better.

He was still leaning against Bob the cow, but the polar bear had returned, curling around the rest of him. Half a dozen dogs were all cuddled close to him, forming a living heated blanket that felt like heaven. However, the best part of this entire menagerie was the split-coloured hybrid curled pressing his back against Tommy's. He had missed the comfort that causal contact could bring, so he happily soaked up every second of it.

Still, he would have to rise at some point and so he steeled his nerves and braced his arms to push himself up. Sadly, he was quick to discover that his body was *not* ready for him to do so. Everything went sideways and he leaned into the side of the polar bear, head spinning and black dots in his vision.

A snout pressed against his head, snuffling in concern while a hand pressed to his back. After a few seconds, Tommy managed to straighten up (though if he left his hand buried in the fur, that was between him and the polar bear), turning his head slightly. There, he found Ranboo watching him with concern in his eyes.

He smiled before croaking out, "What's up, boob boy?" and immediately dissolving into a harsh attempt to cough up a lung.

Ranboo rubbed his back soothingly as he worked to regain his breath and the polar bear kept up a steady rumble beside him. Whatever he had caught on that accursed beach still had yet to move on. Deciding to ignore the way he was leaning into the comforting touch Ranboo was offering, he ran his hands through the fur of the polar bear beside him.

"Aren't you the most wonderful being ever?" Tommy cooed, ignoring the snickering enderman hybrid beside him. "You're the absolute best. Yes, you are."

"Her name is Baba," Ranboo helpfully chimed in from behind him.

Tommy pointedly continued to ignore him but did throw in the name while cooing over Baba. He turned to do the same with Bob, but the effort failed as he was still weak and ill. All too soon, Tommy found himself back in the same position, dizzy and coughing, with Ranboo offering comfort.

One of the dogs in his lap whined a bit, tongue lolling out and tail wagging as they begged for attention. He obliged, petting the creature, who Tommy was sure was shooting boastful looks to the other dogs, who all appeared jealous of the lap dog.

A crow dropped an apple on his head, thoroughly ruining the serene moment. It cawed at him as both Baba and the dog expressed their displeasure with the bird vocally. Tommy, however, was now fully focused on the piece of fruit in front of him. His stomach gurgled in protest, reminding him that it had been a while since he'd last eaten.

Tommy took a small bite of the fruit, painfully aware that if he ate too fast or too much, it would upset his stomach. The cough could also set off his stomach if it had anything in it and he couldn't afford to get even sicker right now. Still unwell, Tommy handed the apple over to Ranboo, snapping at him not to eat it before flopping over and falling back asleep.

Ranboo sighed at the apple in his hand, carefully setting it down on a plate that was beside the blankets. He pulled out his comm, which had been vibrating non-stop for a few minutes now, to see what was going on. He braced himself for angry texts directed at him, maybe some toxic bullshit from Quackity or the rest of the L'Manberg crew.

He most *certainly* didn't expect Tubbo's absolute teardown of Dream.

So, they were finally deciding to act. It was a bit too late for that, but at least they were trying to do something. Still, there wouldn't be a lot of people on the server willing to believe Dream would do something like this. Not without proof.

Ranboo glanced down at the sleeping teen before him, his face buried in Baba's fur. The smile on the back of his neck was plainly visible, and before Ranboo knew what he was doing, he took a photo.

[Ranboo: He's telling the truth]

He sent the image, a sense of satisfaction filling him. Let everyone see the true Dream. Let them see what *their* negligence had brought upon an innocent boy. He then shut off the comm and went to curl up with Tommy, ignoring every buzz and beep as the server went mad.

So I gave Tommy the illness I managed to pick up at college in March, acute bronchitis.
He'll have fun with that.

See you all at some point in the near future.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Sam finally checks his comm, Techno does his best, and Baba is a worried mama bear

Chapter Notes

So first off, absolute kudos to my beta Author_Of_Insanity101 who has been an idea generator. She also wrote the first section of this chapter and it's my favourite bit so she deserves all the praise.

So, just so we're clear, I absolutely encourage fanart, just send me a link.

Edit: Now edited (and with new additions) by my lovely beta, Author_of_Insanity101

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Sam was hard at work, laying out the plan for the big build Dream had commissioned him to make. He had spent weeks grinding for the materials: blackstone, obsidian, and so, so much redstone.

He still wasn't quite sure about the server needing a prison, but a job was a job, and Dream was the admin.

He let himself get lost in the quiet solitude of the build, tuning out everything around him. The mobs hadn't been bothering anyone as of late, and Sam couldn't remember the last time a creeper had come and destroyed his progress.

A little voice in his head suggested that he should be more concerned by that, but he ignored it. He'd long since given up trying to understand his feral brethren.

"Sam!"

Sam perked up, a smile forming beneath his gas mask as he spotted the familiar figure of Ponk running up to him.

"Oh, hey Ponky." Sam gave the Lemon City doctor a wave as he leaned on his shovel. "Long time no see."

"Long time no see?!" Ponk's eyes were blazing through the eyehole of his balaclava. "Is that all you have to say?! Why are you still here?!"

Sam blinked, completely thrown off by the anger radiating off of the usually calm and collected man. It was so unlike him. “Ponk? Are you okay?”

“No Sam! No, I am not okay! Didn’t you see the messages?!” He began wildly waving his communicator in the air. “Did you not see what’s been going on?!”

Sam’s face scrunched up at that, recalling hearing his communicator beeping a bit. He had ignored it, wanting to keep working a bit before taking a break. Now though, seeing all the emotion in Ponk’s eyes, he couldn’t ignore it. So, he picked up his communicator and opened the messages.

Gunpowder filled his mouth as his vision went red, eyes going wide at the picture of Tommy posted on the chat. The words blended together and that smile carved into Tommy’s neck made his blood boil, literally.

He heard the hissing sound of a creeper before an explosion went off around him. He didn’t realise it had come from him until he blinked and was in the small basecamp bed he’d set up.

“Sam?” Ponk approached the bed, looking concerned. “You just... you just exploded.”

“How did this happen?” Sam growled, opening a chest to grab his spare armour and as much food as he could carry. “How did none of us notice that this was going on?”

“Because of Dream, that’s how!” Ponk exclaimed, his anger returning in full force now that it was more appropriate for the situation. “This never should have happened, Sam! I’m supposed to get notifications whenever someone is gravely hurt! Communicators automatically send out alerts for this kind of thing! But I never received any for this, Sam!! Not once!!”

“What do you mean you never got any alerts?” Sam questioned. “A player is supposed to have their communicator on them at all times, and Tommy isn’t the type to mess about with that kind of stuff.”

“I don’t think he had a choice, Sam.”

Ponk held up his own communicator, where there was a barrage of failed messages Ponk had attempted to send Tommy. All of them were followed by the same error code:

[Communicator Code: Invalid]

“How can a communicator code be invalid?” Sam already knew the answer, and he really didn’t like the implications. Even Ghostbur could still send messages on his communicator, and he was a ghost!

“I’ll tell you how, Sam! It’s invalid because the communicator’s gone!! It’s gone, Sam! Dream took it, probably destroyed it!”

Sam distantly registered hissing, though it took him a moment to place it as his own. Slowly he drew in a breath, desperately grasping for his self-control to prevent another explosion.

Opening his eyes to look at Ponk once more, he noted the cautious look in the man's gaze but brushed it off.

"We need to go check up on him. Luckily, I know *exactly* where to start."

Techno huffed as he looked out his window, seeing *his* barn which held *his* little brother. And yet, here he sat, brotherless and barnless after getting kicked out by the mobs inside.

Golden runt

Runt

Runt

L

Don't sit and take this

Brotherblade

Doing his best to ignore the voices, for the time being, Techno tried to focus on a plan. The animals were convinced that they didn't need him to help care for Tommy, but they couldn't brew potions or cook warm food. They also didn't know about Tommy's affinity for golden apples or how he liked his steaks cooked, or how he liked red blankets the best because red was a warm colour which made blankets warmer. No, the animals didn't know Theseus as he did, and he was going to prove that they needed his help. (That Tommy needed his sounder)

Food was immediately at the top of the list. Potions were all well and good, but just potions alone wouldn't work. It wasn't recommended to drink potions on an empty stomach or to take more than one potion at a time. People still ignored that little rule, especially after the dumb invention of the "Furious Cocktail" achievement. Still, a couple of healing and regen potions wouldn't hurt.

Now, in terms of food, something easy on the stomach was crucial, as Tommy likely couldn't stomach anything heavier than a light soup. Techno could probably make some mushroom soup, or maybe beetroot. Nothing with meat *just* yet. Plus, soup would be easy to make in bulk, meaning there would be plenty to store and reheat. A practical choice for the situation at hand.

Mushroom pog

Shrooms

E

Shrooms

Mushroom Henry

Beets are blood

Blood for the Blood God

Mushrooms

E

E

The overlapping clamour in his head was once more of two minds, but the general consensus leaned towards mushroom stew and so his decision was made.

He gathered his ingredients, laying them out across his kitchen counter. Butter, chicken stock, both red and brown mushrooms, a shallot, a little flour, some garlic as well as some fresh herbs, salt, and pepper for taste. It was an easy recipe, one of the first he'd learned after coming to the overworld, and one he knew would be perfect.

He chopped up the shallot and minced the garlic as the butter melted in the pot. Once it melted, he tossed the vegetables in. They quickly softened and he added in the mushrooms, letting them cook before adding in the stock and the herbs. It was already smelling good, so he gave it a good stir before leaving it to cook.

Leaving the pot alone, Techno worked to get everything cleaned up, his mind wandering to the situation at hand. He ended up pausing in the middle of wiping down the counter, his head hanging in regret. How did things come to this state? Tommy ~~his runt~~ was injured and sick, living in his barn, and his pets had turned against him, refusing him the ability to take care of him.

Ranboo had said that food and medicine were acceptable, but had made it clear that Techno wasn't welcome near Tommy. But maybe... maybe if he showed that he really did want to help, that he really did care, he could convince the animals to change their minds.

Maybe if he was lucky, he could earn the chance to see Tommy again.

Baba snuffled in concern once more, nosing at the golden child sleeping beside her. While his fever was beginning to come down, his breath still sounded wheezy, and even asleep, his coughs were harsh and wet.

The expression of concern on the ender hybrid's face did nothing to calm her nerves. He muttered to himself as he glanced between the cub and the strange object he clutched in his claws. Still, there was little she or the hybrid could do in this situation besides offer comfort to the cub.

"Relax," Steve grumbled from somewhere behind her. "The cub is safe, which will encourage healing. There is nothing more we can do about the illness. The cub shall beat it in his own time."

Huffing in displeasure, Baba forced herself to calm down. She knew that Steve was right about that, but still. This was *her* cub. If she wished to fuss, then she would. Closing her eyes, she did her best to relax beside him and get some rest, though she suspected that it was not in her future.

Chapter End Notes

Is it obvious that I don't know how stew is made?

I need to make it known that this Google Doc is currently 61 pages long, which is kinda insane to me.

Anyway, as long as literally nothing else in my life melts down in the the next however, there should be one more update out before I go back to school in Sept.

To those of you whose comments I've been ignoring, I will get to you soon,

Thank you all so much for the kudos and comments, you lot rock!!

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Logestedshire, Techno, Server meeting, and Allium Duo, oh my!

Chapter Notes

As always, edited (with additions) by my wonderful (and long suffering) beta, Author_of_Insanity101

Note, my beta has gone through and made edits and corrections throughout the story, so anyone who has read the story before Jan 20th, 2023, you should probably go back and read the updates so you are aware of the changes

Cheers to all of you, thank you for all your support, kudos, and comments!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A lone mooshroom stood on the outskirts of the destroyed campsite, ash still the dominant scent in the air. All the greenery was destroyed and he was alone, with no wildlife or humans in sight. Still, he was tense, worried about the return of one who destroyed this place. The green monster would try and harm him to hurt Tommy, his person.

Mushroom Henry wanted Tommy back, but not if it meant having them return here.

There was a loud crack that nearly made the mooshroom choke on his cud. He turned around to the nether portal, watching the cracked obsidian repair itself as a purple tear in the universe formed. The sight sent terror rushing through Mushroom Henry. Only one thing ever came through that portal: the green monster.

The mooshroom was quick to take cover behind one of the few remaining trees in the area, not wanting to be seen. Even there, he could hear the sizzle of strange magic growing louder as humans began to form in the rip in the universe. They stepped forward, pausing to take in the scene.

To Mushroom Henry's surprise, neither of the humans who came through was the green monster. One *was* green, but their mask was different. It only covered the lower half of their face and was pouring out smoke. That made sense since they looked and smelled like a creeper. The other one was also in a mask, but this one was colourful and covered their entire

head, except their eyes. This one was muttering all of Tommy's favourite words, sounding extremely upset.

Gently grabbing hold of the loud one's elbow, the creeper began to pull him along as they picked their way through the wreckage of the site. It wasn't long before the loud one broke away with a cry, running over to the ruins of the cabin the ghost had built. His companion picked up the pace and came to a stop beside him.

Mushroom Henry began to creep forward to get a better sense of what the pair were up to. As he approached, he saw the loud one point at a brown stain, their shouts becoming clearer the closer he got.

"-blood, Sam! This is dried blood! It's far from recent, which could only mean-!" the loud one cut himself off, rubbing his covered face. "...Sam, I need to check on Tommy, this is-

Sand shifted under Mushroom Henry's hoof and he watched in horror as the creeper hybrid stiffened and raised his hand in front of his companion's face. The creeper hybrid drew his trident before whipping around to face the frozen mooshroom.

Mushroom Henry's terror was only somewhat abated when the creeper hybrid lowered the weapon, making it disappear as they looked him over. "What's a Mooshroom doing out here?"

The colourful man looked up and Mushroom Henry flicked his ear nervously, his ear tag clicking slightly. At the sound, the colourful man perked, pointing at it.

"Sam. Sam, look at that." The creeper took a glance at Mushroom Henry's ear, making the mooshroom uncomfortable. "That's the tag animals in Antfrost's animal sanctuary have."

"There's a name tag too."

The creeper reached out for the name tag hanging from Mushroom Henry's cowbell. Mushroom Henry started to jerk backward before the creeper pulled back and did his best to utter soothing noises. Mushroom Henry relaxed and gingerly stepped closer, permitting him to look at the name tag. Gently, the hand moved to take hold of the tag.

"Mushroom Henry," the creeper muttered before turning it over to look at the back. "If found, please return to TommyInnit."

Mushroom Henry couldn't help the way he perked up when he heard the name of his calf. The gesture was not missed by the two men, who exchanged glances. The creeper then crouched down next to Mushroom Henry and rested his hand on his side.

"You're also missing Tommy, Mushroom Henry?"

His colourful companion hesitated before gently patting him on the snout. "Would you like to come with us? We're also looking for him and I think he would like you to be somewhere comfortable and safe."

Shifting his attention between the pair, he noticed the genuine stress in their posture, worry in their eyes, and fear in their tone. Mooing once, he carefully stepped towards the standing man, ready to bolt at the first sign of trouble.

He trembled slightly when a leash was attached to his collar, but he didn't pull. Not yet. Instead, he watched the loud one and the creeper exchange glances.

"This biome seems to be connected to a nearby tundra," the creeper noted, peering off into the distance with a spyglass on his belt. "There's a chance Tommy went further inland, trying to escape."

"It's as good a start as any. I don't see any signs of a boat, and there's no way someone in Tommy's condition could swim anywhere." The loud one looked out at the inland. "Come on. We're wasting time."

Without another word between them, the two players started hiking inland. Mushroom Henry trailed after them, wondering if they would truly find his Tommy... and if that would be a good thing.

Technoblade came bearing soup for two, hoping that it would be enough to tempt Ranboo into letting him through the door. Knocking on the stable door with his foot, Techno stood there for a minute, feeling like a fool all the while.

Suddenly, the door snapped open to reveal the still-suited enderman hybrid, who did not look pleased to see him. However, his expression lightened slightly at the sight of food and he reached out to take the bowls from Techno.

"Can I-?"

"No."

The door slammed shut just in front of Techno, leaving him blinking in the snow, still brotherless.

Phil sat angrily in the White House meeting room, watching as it filled with other members of the server. Everyone was showing up for this thing, regardless of country affiliation or faction. Even the server recluse had come out of their hovel to be part of this meeting, a silent George sitting quietly next to the literally smoking Sapnap. Even Ghostbur was present, an uncharacteristic solemn expression on his face, and a strange blue sheep in his arms.

The only notable server member missing at the moment was Technoblade, but not even Phil could get him to respond. Nobody wanted to push for his attendance, with Phil himself content to leave him to protect Tommy while they moved against Dream.

"What is he doing here? Isn't he on house arrest?" Quackity was the one to begin the conversation, sending a murderous expression toward Phil.

Phil calmly stared back, unfazed by his rage. He quirked an eyebrow at the words, unimpressed by the subject raised. "If you haven't realised, we have a bigger issue than your petty grudges against me. Now if you can manage it, we are here to discuss what to do about what Dream did to my son."

Turning away from the sputtering duck hybrid, Phil let himself have a second of pleasure from the spiteful action and its glorious reaction before turning back to the main group.

Apparently, in the two seconds he and Quackity were talking, everything devolved into a screaming chaotic mess. Frankly, they weren't even responding to one another, just yelling at them. The only silent one in the mass was Tubbo, who sat at the front of the room, hands clasped and staring at the floor. From the looks of him, Phil doubted that the boy could hear what was going on around him.

"-bad friend to him-", "-fucking crazy bast-", "-kill him-", "-breathe and discuss this like adul-", "-could he?"

The snippets he heard did not impress him, though Puffy's efforts to calm the group were to be respected, if only a little. This state of affairs continued for at least a couple more minutes before someone interrupted.

Eret rose to their feet with a swish of their cape and a slash of their arm. The room fell silent, everyone turning towards them. Even Phil's attention was drawn to the slightly glowing white eyes that they had revealed from behind their sunglasses.

They dropped the sunglasses back into place with a tired sigh and simply looked at all of them disappointedly. "Have you gotten that out of your systems? Are we ready to have a productive conversation or will you need to keep yelling until you wear yourselves out?"

They dropped back into their seat elegantly before tilting their head, the gleam of their crown seizing Phil's attention for a moment. "Well, any suggestions?"

Quackity, the ever-hot-headed vice president, was the first to jump to an answer. "The first thing we need to do is rescue Tommy from Technoblade. The damn pig will probably do something to the kid, so we need to kill Technoblade and save Tommy."

Phil wrinkled his nose in disgust at the fact that the only thing that Quackity could ever think up was violence against his dearest companion and surrogate son. "Techno won't hurt Tommy. Considering he killed Dream for Tommy's sake, I don't think either of my sons should be bothered right now."

Quackity whirled to face him, a sneer cutting across his face like an ugly scar. "Technoblade destroyed the place that Tommy called his home and told him to die. He's not a safe person for Tommy to stay with. Though what else should I expect from the man who killed his own kid?"

Phil reared backward as if Quackity had slapped him, feathers puffing up in rage. But before he could launch himself across the room, an emotionless voice cut in. Tubbo, looking gaunt and almost ghostly, had risen to his feet, though his eyes were not fixed on anything.

“Why are you even still holding on to that stupid grudge, Quackity? Hasn’t it been made clear to you that we are no match for Technoblade? Not in the state we’re in.”

Quackity sputtered at that, but Tubbo didn’t even acknowledge him. His unseeing gaze then shifted over to Phil, making the Elytrian wither slightly.

“And Phil, if Technoblade was truly taking care of Tommy, he wouldn’t have been sleeping in a barn. Both of you forgot about him, Technoblade in his leaving, and your lack of care. He’s your youngest son and clearly the one you forgot about.”

Throughout this, Tubbo’s voice rose and rose in volume until he was screaming, tears falling down his face. “Then again, who in this room didn’t? We failed him! We *all* failed him! Not one of us stepped in! Not one of us helped him! No one even cared to visit him except for fucking *DREAM!!*”

With that, he turned and sprinted out of the building, leaving everyone behind him in emotional disarray. They all watched in stunned silence as the doors slowly closed behind the boy, clicking shut much louder than they should have been.

Fundy was the first to recover, clearing his throat. When everyone turned to look at him, the fox shrunk away from them, fixing his gaze on the ground.

“Let’s forget about Technoblade for now. Right now, Dream is the biggest issue. If he’s willing to do… Prime I can’t even *say it*… If what he did to Tommy is any indication of character, then who knows what he has in store for the rest of us.” He swallowed hard, forcing himself to meet everyone’s eyes. “Besides, even if Technoblade *is* a threat to Tommy, I feel that he would have to go through the animals first, specifically that polar bear that… ah… unalived Dream…”

Phil found himself nodding along with the rest of the room, though he was still upset at the mere insinuation of Technoblade being a danger to Tommy.

Sapnap leaned forward, a look of rage in his eyes as flames danced his shoulders and smoke curled from between his fingers. “Now, let’s plan a manhunt.”

Tommy stirred once more to the scent of mushroom soup. Easing himself upward, he saw two still steaming bowls on the ground next to Ranboo. He was hungry but he could only make his fingers twitch out towards it, every instinct in his body screaming out a warning.

Ranboo picked up a spoon, using it to gesture to the bowl. "Careful, it's hot."

Tommy snorted out a raspy noise. "Not as hot as I am, Boob boy."

Ranboo sighed, a smile tugging away at his mouth. However, instead of handing over the bowl, the hybrid scooted closer and filled the spoon up before lifting it towards Tommy. The teen frowned, glaring in distaste at the hand attempting to feed him. He was a Big Man! He could bloody well feed himself!

“I don’t need your help…” he grumbled.

“Of course not.” Ranboo didn’t sound like he meant it. “Still, I want to. Just until your hands steady, alright?”

Tommy levelled him with a glare but reluctantly opened his mouth for the spoon. “This doesn’t leave the barn, got it? I will kill you if you tell anyone.”

Despite his terrifying threats, Ranboo didn’t seem fazed. “You have my word.”

With the promise secured, Tommy allowed the tall hybrid to carefully feed him. And if he *happened* to rest his head on Ranboo’s lap for comfort, who would know?

Chapter End Notes

So...uh, long time, no see? This chapter has been partially finished since the start of fall semester and it is currently the start of spring semester, so whoops. Kudos goes to my beta, who has had to deal with my inability to commit to deadlines.

Next upload will be soon enough, promise (its all plotted out, it just needs to be written). However, I do owe readers of my Pirate!AU an update, so that might (just might) come first.

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Ponk's angry and willing to make it everyone else's problem, Edward is subject to increased hostilities, and Dream is still nuts

Chapter Notes

Shout out once again to my lovely and long-suffering beta (and co-writer) Author_Of_Insanity101, who turned the doc purple in an effort to get me to focus.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ponk was fuming the entire trek through the tundra, their fury about the situation still burning in their chest. Sam wasn't doing much better, smoke continuing to puff through his mask with every step. The skittish mooshroom continued to follow them, though was more than a little nervous about the anger radiating off of the two players.

All any of them could think of was Tommy. The cold of Logstedshire had been brutal, but the tundra was even worse. If Tommy had retreated into such a harsh climate to escape Dream, then there was a good chance that he was not in the best shape. That thought has Ponk fuming beneath their mask with every step as the cold bit at their eyes.

As they made their way through the thick trees, the small group could see smoke rising in the distance. Finally stepping out of the forest, they came across a fenced off clearing, and a rustic cabin alongside a barn. Both Sam and Ponk stopped at the sight, knowing instinctively that this had to be where Tommy had retreated to. The picture of Tommy had shown pieces of a wooden interior, and this was the only sign of civilization for miles.

However, both Sam and Ponk knew that Tommy couldn't have built this place. It wasn't his style, nor was he in any shape to build. This belonged to a player. Question was, who?

Ponk was the first to steel their nerves, straightening up and forcing as much power into their eyes as they could. They marched towards the door, leaving Sam to quickly tether Mushroom Henry to the gate before rushing after him. He made it to the front stoop just as Ponk gave a firm, yet polite, knock.

The door opened after a minute, and the two of them were immediately staring down the shimmering, netherite head of the Axe of Peace. Both of them blinked slightly at the display

of aggression, but otherwise didn't react as they followed the handle of the axe all the way to its wielder, Technoblade.

"Oh great, more visitors," the piglin grumbled, not lowering the axe. "Whatever you're selling, I ain't buyin', so scram."

In response to the gruff dismissal, Ponk's eyes blazed with fury and they slapped the axe away. "Where's Tommy?"

Techno tensed ever so slightly, but managed to maintain a steady poker face. "I said get lost. I've had enough people ruining my property value and threatening me to last a lifetime. So hippity-hoppity, get off my property."

Sam was about to say something, but Ponk beat him to it. The small doctor marched right up into Techno's face, summoning a pair of netherite hoes into each of his hands. Somehow, the weapon choice worked because Techno took a step back.

(Then again, it could have been the sheer aura of murder surrounding the doctor)

"Technoblade, I want you to listen to me *very* carefully." Ponk pressed forward, knuckles white around the hoes as he backed Techno against a wall. "We *know* Tommy is here. We also know that he has been stripped of his communicator, and has thus been deprived of the medical treatment that he needs. So, you are going to tell me *exactly* where he is right this second, or I am going to take these hoes and *turn you into fertilizer for your POTATO FARM!!*"

There was a beat of silence as the two stared down one another. Sam took that moment to walk in, placing his hands on Ponk's shoulders.

"Techno, please," he pleaded, playing the part of the good cop. "Tommy needs medical attention. *Proper* medical attention. I have no doubt you're doing the best you can for him, but..."

That got a snort out of Techno, who seemed to deflate. The Axe of Peace slipped out of his hands and he leaned back against the wall, running his fingers through his hair.

"Honestly, I would love to do more for him. I would love to try and make things right with Theseus, but..." he sighed, rubbing his face before turning toward the barn. "He's in there, under the protection of pretty much every animal in existence."

That made both Sam and Ponk back off, turning toward the barn. It was water-tight and insulated, but not the best place for a child, much less a sick child. Ponk turned to begin the trek over there but was stopped when Techno spoke up again.

"I wouldn't if I were you. Every time someone has opened that door, they've been attacked. They're insanely protective of Tommy and won't let anyone in. Hell, they used Ranboo to basically tell me to fuck off and pound sand when I tried to suggest bringing him inside."

“Of course they’re protective,” Sam insisted. “To mobs, be it passive or hostile, the idea of harming their young is absolutely insane.”

“And Tommy always did like animals,” Ponk recalled, their voice softening slightly. “Not surprising that they decided to pick up everyone’s slack.”

Sam thought on that for a minute, his mind bringing up the memory of the creeper that had ignored Bad. Could that have been related to this? Were the server mobs rallying to Tommy’s side? If so, it would explain why the forest had been so full of mobs on their way here. He and Ponk had probably only been spared because of Mushroom Henry.

Sam perked, an idea forming. He glanced over at where he’d tethered the mooshroom, then back at the barn.

“Ponk, I have an idea. But for this to work, you have to keep quiet and take off all your armor.”

Edward was happy in the barn. It was warm, dry, there was a happy atmosphere, and there were two younglings.

Then the barn door slowly swung open and the atmosphere dissolved, everyone tensing. They faced the door, watching as the creeper hybrid player stood before them. Their armor was off, revealing only a green hoodie, and they had their hands in the air. Wrapped around one wrist was a lead, and on that lead was a mooshroom.

Red-loud-gold perked up at the sight of the mooshroom, gasping happily. "Mushroom Henry, I've missed you!"

The mooshroom, clearly Mushroom Henry, was carefully released by the creeper hybrid. Immediately, they trotted over and gently headbutted the youngling, who was held steady by their companion. Having said hello, Mushroom Henry turned to face the rest of the animals in the barn, still standing beside *red-loud-gold*.

"The creeper and the loud, red and yellow one want to come into the barn. The angry pig said you won't let anyone in because of the calf. These two want to help the calf."

Baba snorted and tossed their head. *"How can we trust any human with the cub? They've already proven that they aren't to be trusted with younglings so why should we let them in, especially with one so weak?"*

Mushroom Henry stomped their hoof and swished their tail. *"Because if we don't get human help, they won't get better. We know nothing of human ailments and their treatments, but the loud one does. More than that, the loud one and the creeper came to the island looking for the calf. They were the first outside of the half-ender and the green, masked one."*

Edward looked out at the creeper hybrid, then spotted the smaller companion next to them. Both of them were not wearing any armor or carrying any weapons. In fact, there was a fair-

sized pile of armor and weapons behind them, well out of reach and visible. Clearly, both of them had stripped themselves of their armour and weapons before approaching the barn in an attempt to come off as non-threatening.

It was Bob who spoke up next, breaking up the staring match between Baba and Mushroom Henry. *"Something must be done for the golden calf. They are not well and if we refuse all human treatment, are we not as bad as them for the cubs?"*

That thought alone cowed Baba into submission. The idea of being a detriment to the already struggling cub was an idea they refused to acknowledge. Slowly, they laid back down, huffing as they did. *"Very well..."*

Edward turned toward Ranboo, who sat there watching, tense but not panicked. *"Youngling, what are you and your companion's feelings on the matter?"*

The ender hybrid turned to face *red-loud-gold*, who was still burying their face in Mushroom Henry's flank. With a quiet exchange between the pair, Ranboo faced Edward once more. *"Let them in. Tommy needs a doctor."*

Edward nodded at that, then turned to the two players. They gestured for them to come in, which they did, closing the barn door behind them.

Dream was scowling as he looked at himself in the reflection of the river water. His first Canon Death, and it had been a brutal one. Thrown to a polar bear and mauled to death, slowly and brutally. The scars left on him were jagged and ugly, four in total running parallel to each other diagonally across his face.

How dare Technoblade do this to him?! How dare he toss him aside like he was unwanted dirt blocks?!

With a growl, he punched the water and got up, taking stock of everything. He was completely devoid of all tools and resources thanks to his death, and he had been forcefully relocated all the way to Spawn. His clothes were basically in tatters and his mask was gone.

Still, there was some silver lining to this. He was no longer starving or exhausted, having been given a bit of a refresh upon being respawned. Plus, he now had confirmation that Tommy was in Techno's barn.

Unfortunately, returning to collect the boy was more than a little ill advised. The amount of angry messages flooding his communicator proved that he was the server's most wanted man.

Still, Dream knew exactly who would come when he called. The one person he could trust, his ultimate soldier and perfect partner in crime.

“Hey Punz,” he said into his communicator, a manic grin spreading across his face. “I’ve got a job for you.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm done with school for the year so I'll actually have time to write (ignore) updates!

To the comments I have been ignoring, I'll get to you I promise, I see all of them.

Thank you all so much for the kudos and comments, I adore all of you.

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Medicine, Planning, and Hunting

Chapter Notes

So this chapter got written with contributions (and heavily edited) by my lovely beta (and co-writer) Author_of_Insanity101. Sorry it took so long to write and kudos to Author_of_Insanity101 for pushing me to actually write the dang thing and holding me to account for finishing it.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

When the pureblooded Enderman, Edward, according to the collar hanging around its neck, opened the barn door for them, Sam felt genuine relief that his plan had worked. He had been worried they would be turned away, forced to leave Tommy behind. Thankfully, it hadn't come to that.

Of course, there were some conditions.

Sam had been immediately herded into a corner of the barn, made to kneel out of the way and under the very careful guard of several of the dogs. He didn't fight it, simply making himself comfortable while keeping his hands in his lap. Ponk had thankfully been allowed to approach Tommy, his partner smiling and moving slowly with every step.

"Hey Tommy," Ponk greeted as they got to their knees in front of the boy. They reached forward slowly, keeping both hands in view. The other hybrid, Ranboo, Sam recalled, kept a wary eye on the proceedings while sitting on the side.

"Sup big they, how's it been?" Tommy's voice was hoarse and weak, but his gaze was focused and he seemed to understand what was happening around him. Sam didn't know much about medicine but he felt it was a good sign.

Ponk's hands stopped, hovering above Tommy's skin. "I'm doing okay, but I'd feel better if you'd be willing to let me take a look at you. It's the doctor's urge, you know? So, is it cool for me to poke and prod you?"

Tommy snorted, a painful rasp, and immediately started coughing. Everyone, Player and animal, flinched at the noise. Ponk immediately summoned a bottle of water from their

inventory, removing the stopper and holding it out. The teen quickly grabbed it, downing the contents to try and soothe his throat.

Sam winched, knowing that was certain to hurt. However, he stilled himself, knowing that any action he took could be taken as hostile. Besides, there was nothing he could do for the time being. He had to be compliant and stay where he was told.

“Tommy,” Ponk spoke up, keeping their voice gentle. “How long have you been sick like this?”

Tommy shrugged. “Dunno, at least a week or so. Time’s not been great.”

Sam was no doctor but he was sure that being sick enough to lose touch with time was a bad sign. Looking at Ponk’s expression did nothing to dissuade him of this idea. Sure, it was subtle but the tenseness in their body increased enough that Sam, who knew them well, was convinced that all was, in fact, not well.

“Why didn’t you call me?” Ponk asked, though their voice made it clear that they already knew the answer.

With a snort, Tommy summoned his communicator from his inventory. Seeing it, Sam couldn’t contain the angry hiss that slipped through his teeth. It had been destroyed, the dents on the body suggesting someone had stomped on it. The antennae was snapped, the screen was shattered, and several buttons were missing.

“This answer your question?” The boy tossed the broken machine to the ground. “I was trying to message Tubbo and...” His eyes grew distant, like all the life was draining out of them. “Dream said that exile meant no contact with anyone. So... he made sure I couldn’t be bad again...”

Ponk, the ever-conscientious medical professional, was able to set aside their reaction quickly, focusing back on the bigger issue. Sam had to take inspiration from their shift just to prevent himself from doing something stupid. Still, it was a good thing his respirator blocked his mouth from being seen. People didn’t tend to like snarls, especially not on creeper hybrids.

Speaking of snarls, Ranboo looked positively feral at the sight of the broken communicator. He was spitting and growling, hands flexing like he wanted to claw someone’s face off. Sam noted, offhandedly, that Tommy didn’t even flinch. Nor did he flinch when Ranboo scooted right over to the boy, curling around him.

“You weren’t bad,” he said softly, pressing his face into the boy’s hair. “There’s nothing bad about wanting to talk to your friends. Dream’s the bad one for breaking your things and hurting you. That’s abuse, plain and simple.”

Tommy just groaned slightly, leaning into Ranboo. The fact that he didn’t speak to agree or disagree spoke volumes about the boy’s mental state.

Ponk’s hands still hovered in the air. “Tommy, may I?” They prompted the teen once more.

This time, Tommy nodded and one of Ponk's hands came to rest on Tommy's forehead. The other went to his wrist, two fingers checking his pulse. Through the balaclava they wore, Sam could see the medic grimace..

Rocking back a bit, Ponk stilled, listening to the way Tommy breathed for about a minute. "You've got bronchitis, which is an infection of your lung. Normally, I'd be less concerned by bronchitis this early on, but with your general health concerns and the fever you are running, it's a more serious issue that needs to be monitored. Frankly, I would prefer to transfer you to a warmer climate, somewhere you could rest off of the ground and in a more sterile environment than a barn."

Tommy grimaced. "Don't got nowhere fitting to go. Can't go back to Logstedshire. Dream will almost certainly be back there at some point, I don't have great memories there, and it doesn't meet your criteria."

"You're never going back to that place," Ranboo declared, an air of finality to his words.

"I'm still banished from L'Manberg, plus my house is made of dirt. Pogtopia is a hole in the ground and..." Tommy shuddered visibly. "And I don't wanna go back there again."

Sam spoke quietly and slowly. "You can come stay with me. I can make you your own space, Ranboo can come, it would be sterile and safe, and Ponk would be close by to treat you. It's of course your choice, but you always have the option."

Tommy looked up, his eyes sparkling with a mix of disbelief and confusion. "You... want me?"

"I do. I told you before that if you needed something that you could come to me, and I meant it."

Tommy's gaze was full of disbelief and confusion. He searched Sam's face as if looking for any signs of deceit.

"Ranboo can come?"

"Of course."

"And... and the others?"

"I'll need time to make some proper enclosures for all of them, but we can make an entire animal farm just for them." He cracked a smile. "It'll be even bigger and better than Antfrost's."

There was a flicker of hope in the boy's eyes. "You promise?"

Sam met his gaze. "I would sooner sacrifice all three of my canon lives before I willingly or knowingly hurt you. I am a man of my word and I *will* keep my promise."

Ponk nodded along with his promise, smiling beneath their balaclava. "All either of us want is to help you, but we can only do that if you let us. So please... let us."

Tommy looked between the two of them, then his gaze flickered over to Ranboo. The enderman was watching them, some of his suspicion giving way to a tentative trust.

"What do you think, Big R?"

Carefully, Ranboo scooped up Tommy, swaddling the boy in one of the blankets (one that looked suspiciously like Techno's cape) and holding him close.

"I say... we trust them."

Punz stood tapping his foot impatiently while waiting for Dream to arrive. Frankly, he was just about to start charging for every minute late to the meeting that Dream was. It was a waste of his time and an inconvenience on his schedule. Dream couldn't even argue, the captive market that he was.

Honestly, he was planning to charge extra simply for making him wait in this cold, creeper-hole riddled landscape thousands of blocks away from everyone. What was this place called again? Logstedshire? It looked like a Tommy build from how shitty everything looked, though the random holes were definitely strange.

Whatever. He didn't care. Tommy was an annoying brat who wasn't worth his time. Maybe if the kid had some treasure to his name that would be different, but no one could give him what Dream could. That's why he was Dream's right hand.

He straightened as he saw someone rowing a boat towards him. As it neared, he saw Dream was sat within something that he could barely call a boat. Numerous tridents were embedded in the wood, along with several severed Drowned limbs. There were even several entire Drowned clinging to the boat and trying to reach for Dream.

"Leave me alone!!" the Admin screamed, smacking the zombies with.... was that a stick?! That was frankly embarrassing of the admin.

With more than a little concern, Punz summoned a crossbow, aiming at the Drowned. He fired off several arrows, nailing the zombies in the head and off Dream's boat. From there, the admin was able to jump from the remnants of his boat and onto the shore. He landed on his knees, then slowly picked himself up.

"Punz," Dream's smile was unhinged, even as far as Punz was concerned, "have I got a plan for us."

"Are... you okay?"

"I will be. Just tell me you brought what I wanted."

Punz rolled his eyes, then summoned the spare netherite gear and weapons Dream had requested, along with the stack of TNT. Seeing them, Dream's manic gaze turned downright sadistic as he quickly took all of it. He armed himself, then took the final item he'd requested: a new mask.

"I knew I could count on you, Punz."

"So what's the plan, Dream?"

Dream slid his mask onto his face, grinning behind it. "I'm going to retake my pawn, and take out some enemy knights along the way."

Sapnap stood at the front of the room with misery hidden deep inside of him. Here he was, using their old childhood game against his ex-best friend, but really, was the Dream of now even really his old friend. The Dream of their childhood would have never done something like this, so Sapnap forced all thoughts of his childhood best friend from his mind to focus on the threat to be managed. Looking at all the people staring up at him, he started talking.

"Okay, our first order of business is to discuss our plans for detaining Dream after we capture him."

Multiple faces shifted into mutinous expressions but he raised his hand, warning away any interruptions.

"I know that almost everyone here wants to kill him, but Dream still has two canon lives left. This means that even if we do kill him, he'll have one left and can just go right back to tormenting everyone. So, we need a way to catch him and detain him without risking him escaping."

Phil's wings flared as he stood. "Between all of us, we should be able to hold him, however powerful he is. He's one man after all, not a God."

Quackity, never one to sit still, also shot up. "*Estúpido*, this is Dream we're talking about. The Master of Manhunts? The Admin of the server? Plus, no matter how many of us there are, we can't watch him 24/7 even if we do manage to catch him."

"Plus," Eret leaned forward, "why should we assume he's alone? All we have to do is look around and see that not everyone is here. He's got Punz at the very least and the last time I saw Sam, he was making something for Dream. We can't assume he's without allies."

George tapped at his glasses, his nervous fidget, while looking towards Sapnap. "He's fixated on Tommy so for better or worse, he'll end up going back for the kid. I know it's not the best plan, but maybe if we stake out Techno's place--"

Phil turned to glare at George. "My son is not bait."

"How could you even suggest something like that?!" Quackity howled, looking utterly enraged. "Are you on his side, George?!"

"Quackity, calm down," Sapnap tried to interject. "George isn't--"

"Don't tell me to calm down, Sapnap!" The duck whirled on the blaze hybrid. "You and George have always been close to Dream! You're literally the Dream Team! How do we

know that neither of you aren't gonna sell us out to the fucker?!"

"It is odd that Sapnap is pushing for Dream to be spared..." Skeppy chimed in softly.

More arguments popped up, devolving into everyone just shouting at each other. Sapnap felt ready to snap until George beat him to it.

"Enough!" His cry was loud enough that everyone froze. "Look, we don't have time for this. You're right that using Tommy as bait is a bad idea and I'm sorry that I even suggested it. And I'll concede that you have every reason to be suspicious of us given what's been going on with Tommy and us."

Sapnap wanted to argue, but George shot him a look. He closed his mouth.

"So, how about this? Sapnap and I will surrender and be placed in custody until Dream is found. We'll dump our inventories and you can choose somewhere for us to stay until this is settled. How does that sound?"

Everyone murmured amongst themselves, admitting to the validity of the plan. Sapnap didn't like it, but he knew with how tense everyone was, surrendering like this was the best idea.

"I'll do it," he decided, slumping onto the table in exhaustion. "If it makes everyone feel better, I'll do it."

"And what guarantee do we have that you'll stay where we put you?" Tubbo chimed in, sounding bitter and cold.

Before anyone could speak up, there was a brilliant flash of light. When it died down, a new figure was hovering in the center of the room. They were cloaked in a light green robe that was lined with gold, their body completely invisible to the point that they just looked like a sentient cloak. What broke this illusion was the white mask with the letters XD carved into it and the floating gold rings that circled their head in the shape of an X.

"Allow me to offer a solution."

Everyone in the room immediately dropped to one knee, recognizing the entity as the God of the Server, XD. They were the voice of the Universe and the most powerful entity that existed on the server.

"XD..." George let out softly, having come to see the God as a friend.

XD looked down at the mushroom-clad man, then a long, white hand extended from their cloak. In their palm, a pair of shimmering golden collars appeared

"Here," it felt as though the breeze had spoken. "These will contain both George and the Blaze Hybrid. They will be confined to a 3x3 chunk area. They will be unable to leave the area and will be barred from nether travel. Only I will be able to remove them."

George reached out and grabbed the two glittering collars, keeping one to himself while tossing the other towards Sapnap. The blaze caught it but didn't put it on just yet.

"We'll put them on when we get to my summer house," George explained, already shedding his stuff and placing it in a nearby chest. "It's an isolated space where we can be contained, and it's far away from anywhere Dream may be brought."

Sapnap nodded at that, beginning to empty his own inventory. As he did, he heard Quackity speak up once more.

"That's all well and good, but we're still no closer to figuring out what to do about Dream."

The air around XD grew colder to the point that everyone shivered. Their breath even condensed a bit as a new collar manifested in the God's hand. This one was made of obsidian and looked bulkier, heavier, and like it was meant to cause pain to the wearer.

"When you catch him, place this on him. This one will shut down that monster's inventory, expelling everything. It will also lock his hotbar and prevent him from being able to wear armour or wield a weapon. It also comes with permanent mining fatigue. You could place him in a glass case and he wouldn't be able to break out." The rings around the God's head seemed to spin faster as if to show the entity's agitation. "It will also permanently fuse to the skin of that monster's neck, ensuring that it cannot be removed, even in death."

Quackity immediately snatched up the collar, looking at it with a sadistic gleam in his eyes. The others were looking at it with a mixture of trepidation and concern.

"What do you intend for us to do when we put this on him?" Niki asked, a slight tremor in her voice.

"I say exactly what we planned to do to Techno," Quackity declared, his eyes never leaving the collar. "Clap him in irons, drag him back here, cage him up, and drop an anvil on his head."

"Absolutely not!" Puffy interjected. "You're just going to execute Dream without a trial? Everyone deserves proper justice, and denying Dream that basic right just makes us as bad as he is."

"Puffy," Bad interjected, grimacing as he did. "Unfortunately, I don't think we can hold Dream long enough for a proper trial. He's a dangerous, unstable individual who can outrun, outfight, and outsmart just about everyone at this table. His backup plans have backup plans and he is never without something in his back pocket."

"With this, we can," Quackity declared, smirking the entire time. "Let Puffy have her trial if it makes her feel better. We all know what the end result will be."

Puffy slumped into her seat, looking far more tired and worn than Sapnap had ever seen her before. He wanted to go and comfort her, but his standing with everyone was tentative at best. So instead, he just stood with George and waited as everyone came to terms with their plan.

"If no one else has any objections, I say we stop running our mouths and get out there," Phil snarled impatiently. "The sooner we get that murderous, abusive son of a bitch under lock

and key, the better."

Everyone began filing out with George and Sapnap taking up the rear. Just before they left the meeting place, the blaze hybrid glanced back at the Server God. He looked down at the collar in his hand, tightening his grip on it.

"Why?" He asked, making the masked entity look up. "Why are you getting involved in all of this? You've only ever been a passive observer, so why... Why is this different?"

A light rumbling filled the air as the Server God looked out the window at the Greater SMP Area. A storm was brewing in the distance, a promise of violence in the wind.

"The Universe has seen the evils of its admin. It has seen his crimes and it has seen his victim. The Universe has spoken, and the Universe says..." lightning struck just beyond the window. "... 'I hate him'."

Chapter End Notes

General plan right now, if nothing goes wrong, is another chapter in 2 weeks or so. Otherwise, we chill.

I desperately need sleep.

My brother and I have been watching a bunch of Phasmophobia together and that's been a bunch of fun for the two of us.

Otherwise, song rec of the week is Goddess by Written by Wolves.

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

The Nether arc begins

Chapter Notes

As always, I, and thus this story, would be nothing without the help, reminders, and contributions of my lovely beta (who possibly does far more than the beta title implies [idk the role description of the post] [frankly, she deserves co-author credit but I've got control issues so sorry]), Author_of_Insanity101. She wrote the entirety of the last chunk so that credit goes fully to her.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo couldn't keep the smile off his face as he carried Tommy out of the barn. Still, with Tommy riding piggy-back, he had no reason to. It had taken some convincing to get the animals to let the kid go, especially Baba the polar bear. None of them wanted to leave Tommy's side, but they also knew that this was his best chance at getting better.

Just what did Tommy do to earn such loyalty from all these mobs?

Ranboo shook off the mild curiosity, sure that he could explore the matter at a later, more convenient time.

The two mostly human adults trailed behind him, pausing only to put their armour back on and gather their weapons. Ranboo watched them, not entirely comfortable with turning his back on the both of them, especially with Tommy clinging to his back. While they had shown that they cared about the boy, the ender hybrid didn't want to risk anything when he didn't have to.

"Lead the way," he called out as the two straightened up, "because I have no idea where we're going."

Sam huffed a laugh while Ponk snorted, both of them moving so they were leading the way out of Techno's territory. Ranboo spared a glance over his shoulder, seeing Techno watching them through the window of his cabin. The enderman huffed, then turned away.

"We should try and find Technoblade's nether portal," Sam mused, already searching the horizon. "The rest of the server is in a complete upheaval after everything that's been going

on and I don't want to expose Tommy to any of that."

"Good thinking," Ponk agreed. "Though I'm worried that the Nether mobs will be just as dangerous and overwhelming as the players."

Ranboo chuckled at that, spotting a skeleton out of the corner of his eyes that was watching them but not raising its bow to fire.

"I don't think we need to worry about any mobs," he remarked. "Nether or otherwise."

Sam paused mid-step, seemingly to ponder on Ranboo's words. It almost looked like he was putting two pieces of a puzzle together and there was a flash of recognition in his gaze. However, he did not act on this revelation, simply stepping forward and continuing onward.

Luckily for them, as far as Ranboo was considered, the Nether portal wasn't too far from the cabin. It was a bit of a trek, Techno having been smart enough to build the portal somewhere that wasn't his front yard given his status on the server, but it wasn't a massive hike.

Stepping through the swirling membrane of the Nether portal, the four adventurers were met with a burst of hot, dry air. It was a stark change from the arctic air of the tundra, providing them with a bit of a shock to the system. Tommy groaned at the change, mumbling into Ranboo's suit jacket about it being too hot.

Ranboo set the pace as he was the one carrying delicate goods. While he wasn't the most comfortable with either of them behind him, he did acknowledge that it was only practical having one watching their backs. So, he had Sam in front of him, leading the way in case his hunch about the mobs proved false.

Ponk took up the rear, rambling about their lemon trees and all of the various treats and meals that they could be used in. At first, Ranboo had been confused by why the masked doctor was being so chatty until he realised he was keeping Tommy's mind active.

With his health at such a rapid decline and the sudden temperature shift, it probably wouldn't be a good idea for the kid to sleep. So, the doctor took it upon himself to talk to Tommy, keeping him engaged and awake.

Despite the more relaxed atmosphere, the warmth, the presence of his friend, and the (supposed) protection walking with him, Ranboo couldn't bring himself to relax. Maybe it was the entire situation, but the enderman still felt jumpy. It was like an itch on the back of his neck, warning him of something dangerous not far ahead.

As Ponk deftly steered their little group through the Nether, they eventually came to what could barely pass as a bridge of the lava ocean below. It was a cobblestone path haphazardly sunken into the netherack, some patchwork holes and non-existent rails making the thing look like a death trap.

"We could...find another way around? Maybe?" Sam offered up, noting the hesitation in the both of their forms

Ranboo frowned but it was Ponk who spoke up.

“Sam, we both know that this is the only path to the portal hub. We don’t have blocks to make a new one or to fortify this one. Sure we could use some of the nearby netherrack, but the dry air and extreme temperatures aren’t good for Tommy. We need to get him back to the overworld as quickly as possible.”

Hesitating for only a second, Ranboo squared his shoulders, Tommy complaining about the insult to his health quietly near his ear, and stepped forward onto the path. It wasn’t perfect, but it was the only chance they had to help Tommy. Eventually, Sam and Ponk trailed behind them.

They were halfway across the bridge when it happened. There was the click of a tripwire hook, then the unmistakable sound of TNT being ignited. Ranboo just had time to gasp in horror before Sam acted. He shoved Ranboo over the edge of the bridge, right where an inlet of netherrack could be seen below.

Seconds later, everything exploded. The shockwave sent everyone flying, the two teens falling for the inlet while both Sam and Ponk were headed straight for the lava. They landed with a splash just as Ranboo crashed onto the hard ground. His ears were ringing and his vision was fuzzy. He had just enough energy to see two figures, one green and one white, approaching them both before everything went black.

Despite their classification as mobs, Piglins had evolved to the point that they had begun to rival human culture. They established trade, formed tribes, domesticated lesser mobs, and even constructed massive complexes to protect themselves from the dangers of the nether. The culture was still primitive compared to the overworld villages and settlements, and their practices could be considered barbaric, but they were the top of the food chain in their inhospitable biome.

Being pack oriented, it only took one to get the rest to act on something. Therefore, it was no surprise to any of them that when a cry of alarm went up, the majority of the brutes grabbed their arms and went running to figure out the issue. The remainder stayed to protect the rest of the sounder.

It was immediately clear what the issue was. After all, a cloud of ash from an explosion was still hanging in the air. Still, explosions were a common occurrence, especially in the open area near the player bridges. Ghosts were known to frequent the area and would shoot anything that wasn’t netherborn.

However, a flash of green visible through the dust was enough to make it clear the source of the alarm.

There is no natural green in the nether, the closest being the bright blue of the warped forest. Some players had tried to bring green to the Nether, but any vegetation that wasn’t native to the area died. As such, the only green that any of the nether creatures knew was worn by the players of the region.

By this point, word had spread of a player monster, one clad in green so bright it shone like lava. Normally, piglins cared little for what players were up to, the exception being when they came to trade. However, this shiny green monster had brought harm to a runt. Even worse, a golden runt. No matter what the species, runts, especially golden ones, were to be protected at all cost. The fact that the so-called “civilised” humans even allowed this to happen was proof that they were the savage ones, not the Piglins.

As a group, the brutes of their Bastion advanced toward the player bridges, using their knowledge of the terrain to move quickly but quietly. As they neared, it became clear that whatever happened was no mere Ghast fireball. The air reeked of the black powder block that the players often brought to the nether, the bridge connecting the various portals reduced to rubble.

On a section of the nether wastes below, two figures were sprawled out on the netherrack. One was the golden runt, and the other was an enderman dressed like a player. However, what had all of the piglins bracing for war were the two figures approaching them. One was a white player, and the other was the green monster.

The piglins, hoping to keep a level of surprise, only exchanged glances, making it clear who was expected to do what. With nothing left to be said or done, those carrying crossbows stepped to the side while those with swords lept into action.

Tommy’s ears were ringing after the explosions. His body hurt and he was left sprawled out on the netherrack. Ranboo was nearby, also sprawled on the ground with his suit singed. He went to reach out for his friend, only for a tight, unyielding hand to grab his wrist. A black-gloved hand attached to a terrifyingly familiar hoodie sleeve.

“There you are, Tommy!” Dream greeted, his hand almost crushing Tommy’s weak wrist. “I’ve been looking everywhere for you! You know you’re not supposed to leave exile, and yet I find you here disobeying me. I thought we were friends, Tommy.”

Terror seized Tommy’s throat, closing it off and making it difficult to breathe. He was pulled roughly to his feet, that iron grip on his arm never fading.

“You know I’m going to have to punish you for this, right Tommy?”

The boy whimpered, trying to muster the strength to apologise, to explain, anything. However, before he could even get a word out, something struck Dream from behind. The masked admin crumbled to the ground, revealing a massive piglin brute, one of many that had surrounded the three of them. This one squealed in rage, kicking Dream away as another brute pulled Tommy out of his grasp.

“What...” he let out, barely able to comprehend what he was seeing.

“*No hurt runt*,” the Brute holding him snorted in piglin, a language Tommy only knew thanks to lessons from Techno. “*Safe now*.”

As if to prove this, several of the brutes began to drag Dream off, stripping him of his mask, his armour, his clothes, everything. They were absolutely merciless as they tore through his inventory, throwing everything they found into the lava. Then they all crowded around the downed man, blocking him from Tommy's view.

He was just starting to relax when Ranboo shrieked. Turning toward the sound, Tommy caught sight of the enderman hybrid thrashing in the grasps of the brutes holding him, screaming in Ender the entire time. In his current state, Tommy could do little to protest what was going on, but he tried.

"Wait..." he croaked. "Don't... don't hurt him..."

The brute holding him began to pat his head. "***Ender not hurt runt. Sounder take care of runt. Ender caught and dealt with.***"

A hazy memory came to Tommy, of his days before the Dream SMP. He remembered learning all about piglins from Techno and how they had conquered the nether. He remembered stories of them domesticating Endermen, of how their evolution had led them to see non-piglins as chattel.

As leads were thrown around Ranboo's neck, he was shoved to the ground and roughly tied up. He was crying out, still trying desperately to reach out for Tommy. Seeing that, the boy knew he had to do something. Ranboo was the first person to actually give a shit about him and these damn pigs were treating him like this?!

Fuck that!

"***Get off him!***" he shouted, his piglin heavily accented and broken, but enough to get his point across.

Silence fell after his shout, the brute holding him freezing in place. Tommy took this as his chance and punched the pig as hard as he could. Weak as he was, he probably didn't do much damage, but it was enough to make the brute drop him. He fell to the ground, the world spinning as pain lanced through his body.

After a moment, Tommy shakily got to his feet, wobbling as he did. Some of the piglins went to grab him, maybe to stabilise him, but he didn't care. Anyone who got close just got a glare and the offending appendage snapped at. He was seeing double and the world was tilting dangerously, but he didn't dare show weakness. Not with what he had planned.

Tommy stumbled over to Ranboo, the piglins parting for him as he got closer. Once he was standing right in front of his friend, he reached down and pulled the leads off of the hybrid's neck. His hands were shaking badly and he barely had the strength to loosen them, but he pushed through.

"Tommy..." Ranboo whimpered.

He shushed the ender hybrid, shaking his head ever so slightly. "Do you trust me?"

Without hesitation, Ranboo nodded. Running with that, Tommy reached for the bandanna that was tied around his neck, pulling it off. He then twisted it into a strip of cloth, then tied it around Ranboo's neck. Around them, the piglins all began to snort in surprise and shock, the ones who had been pinning the enderman down all taking several steps back.

“Mine...” he declared, shakily pointing at the bandanna. *“Mine.”*

He repeated this about three more times before the world began to darken around him. The last of his strength finally gave out and his eyes rolled back in his head. The last thing he remembered was an enderman chirp and long arms catching him, then he knew no more.

Chapter End Notes

The past 48 hours have been some of the most chaotic I've ever had consecutively. I'm also fed up with my roommates atm but honestly that might be my headache talking so we'll see how I'm feeling the next time I get 8 straight hours of sleep (bestie, if you're reading this, skip the next bit), but who knows when that will be. Otherwise rock on you guys. I'll likely be posting again in 2-3 weeks so hope to see you there.

As always, I do really appreciate the comments (I read them even if I haven't actually responded) and the kudos you lot leave.

Song rec is Educated Feet by Swingrowers.

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

The aftermath

Chapter Notes

So this chapter is a reversal of roles. Author of Insanity101 wrote this entire chapter in like a day (I am in awe, mostly because my attention span could never, but also because of how much she wrote) and I beta'd it. So this chapter is her baby so show her the love.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ponk had been lucky enough to maintain all of their canon lives through the madness of the Manberg Revolution. They had unfortunately lost their legs during the Red Festival to Techno's rocket launcher, one of many reasons they held resentment toward the piglin, and they had thought the pain of losing their limbs had been excruciating.

This was *so* much worse.

As the masked doctor respawned in their bed, their skin felt like it was still on fire. They pulled their mask off and shucked off their shirt, trying to alleviate the pain of their skin. Luckily (or unluckily), they had gone into the lava head first, so their death had been quick. But that didn't mean it didn't hurt.

Looking in a mirror, Ponk couldn't help but shudder at what they were seeing. The top part of their chest was now mottled with pink skin that made it look like they'd been splashed with paint. There was a similar splash across their face with their hair badly singed and burnt.

With their clothes off, Ponk was able to breathe and get themselves under control, letting the cool air of Lemon City. It also let their body process everything that had happened, and for their mind to catch up with current events.

After a minute of just sitting there, a feeling of cold dread hit them like a furnace cart. Immediately, they summoned their communicator, checking the most recent messages on the World Board.

[Ponk tried to swim in lava]

[awesamdude tried to swim in lava]

Seeing nothing about Tommy or Ranboo dying was a massive weight off Ponk's shoulders. That meant that Sam had managed to push the two in the direction of one of the netherrack islands, sparing them this painful fate. Unfortunately, Ponk knew that both of them were likely to be gone from the island by the time the two adults managed to regroup and return to the nether. The destroyed bridge would also make returning to the scene of the crime a time-consuming affair.

"Damn it..." the doctor muttered, grimacing as they stumbled over to their brewing stand.
"Damn it, damn it, damn it!"

Through practised motions, they began to brew some burn ointment, setting it up on the stand before sending a message to Sam.

[You whispered to awesamdude: Sam!]

[You whispered to awesamdude: Sam!]

[You whispered to awesamdude: Sam!]

They kept spamming that message over and over again, praying he'd get a response.

Losing a canon life was by far one of the most painful experiences that Sam had ever experienced. He had all but fallen out of his bed as he respawned, tearing off his armour, hoodie, and gas mask as he struggled to breathe. Smoke poured out of his mouth with every painful breath.

"Oh, Prime, TOMMY!"

He fumbled for his communicator, feeling adrenaline rushing out of him when he saw a lack of death messages from Tommy. The boy only had one canon life left and he didn't want Tommy to die like that; in utter agony as a broken shell of the vibrant boy he was supposed to be.

Unfortunately, if Tommy had survived the fall in the nether, then that meant that he was stranded there with whoever had set that trap on the bridge. Of course, there was only one person who had any reason to rig that bridge to blow and only one person who would be hunting for the boy...

As Sam's pain turned to rage at a certain masked admin, his communicator began to chime over and over again with private messages. He looked down, seeing Ponk's growing wall of spammed PMs.

[You whispered to Ponk: I'm here, Ponk]

[You whispered to Ponk: Down a canon life and missing half my fur, but I'm here]

The spam stopped for a bit, then a new message popped up

[Ponk whispered to you: I'm making burn ointment as we speak.]

[Ponk whispered to you: How soon can you get to Lemon City?]

Sam shakily got to his feet, grimacing at the pain in one of his legs. The burns were hideous and tender, but at least he could still walk.

[You whispered to Ponk: I'll be there shortly.]

[You whispered to Ponk: But we can't take too long. Tommy and Ranboo are stranded with our attacker.]

Ponk's message was almost immediate

[Ponk whispered to you: I know, and I have some inkling of who likely has them.]

[Ponk whispered to you: I also know that we need to be in peak physical condition to stand a chance against them.]

That last word caught Sam's attention. He stopped mid-step, eyes narrowing at the message.

[You whispered to Ponk: "Them?"]

The next set of messages came through and Sam felt his blood pressure spiking hard at what he saw.

[Ponk whispered to you: Dream wasn't alone.]

[Ponk whispered to you: I saw him just as we hit the lava.]

[Ponk whispered to you: That bastard bounty hunter Punz.]

Ranboo wasn't sure what to make of what was going on. One minute, the piglins were treating him like some sort of feral monster, (which, in their defence, was an accurate description of how he was acting when they tried to take Tommy) but now they had done a complete 180.

They didn't try to take Tommy from him after the boy put that bandanna on his neck. Instead, they let him carry the unconscious boy as they ushered him into the large bastion not far from the server's chaotic nether hub. He could vaguely see a pair of the larger brutes dragging Dream's battered form down a different path, not being anywhere near as gentle as they were with him and Tommy.

At least this showed that the piglins weren't on his side.

The two teens were led deeper into the bastion, away from the lava wastes outside. The air was significantly cooler the deeper they moved, which was a bit of a relief, though it did mean that they were getting further and further away from the surface. It would make it harder for them to be found when (or if) Sam and Ponk came looking for them.

They were brought into a room in what felt like the centre of the Bastion, the floors lined with crimson nylium and what looked to be furs and skins piled here and there. Glowstone hung in a clump in the corner of the room, bathing the area in its soft light. There was a chest nearby and what looked to be small bars of gold scattered about the floor.

They were ushered into the centre of the room before being carefully pushed to sit, which earned Ranboo a pat on the head like he was some sort of cat. Then, the piglins left, double crimson doors closing behind them.

For a moment, Ranboo just sat there, struggling to process everything that had happened. He didn't know how to feel about the situation he'd found himself in, and he had no clue what he should be doing. So, he started by taking stock of the room they were in.

Setting Tommy down on one of the fur piles, Ranboo opened the chests. Along with more bits of gold, there were crude toys carved from crimson stems or from large clumps of nylium. It almost looked like a kid's toy chest. Running with this, Ranboo picked up one of the pieces of gold, seeing it had indents that almost looked like teeth marks. This led the enderman to conclude they had been placed in a room meant for the children of the bastion.

Closing the chest, Ranboo approached the doors, carefully testing them. They weren't locked, but Ranboo didn't trust himself to remember the way out. Plus, he had no idea what the piglins would do if he tried to leave with Tommy. The idea of being manhandled and tied up again made him churr and shudder.

With a sigh, he returned to Tommy's side, plopping down on the nylium carpet. As he idly combed his claws through the boy's sweaty hair, he toyed with the bandanna still on his throat. It wasn't lost on him that it looked like Tommy had collared him, especially with the piglins patting him and treating him like some sort of pet.

Ranboo knew all too well that there were many people who were fascinated with claiming endermen as pets. It wasn't hard to find a domesticated enderman chilling in someone's base, collared and name-tagged. Piglins liked to emulate players, so they probably took up the practice of domesticating his kin.

This meant that to save him, Tommy had claimed Ranboo as his.

Ranboo chewed on that for a bit, mulling on his feelings on the matter. Tommy hadn't done it lightly and he'd even asked for consent before doing it. And, honestly, Ranboo found that he didn't find the idea repulsive. Tommy had earned his loyalty and trust, and the fact that he had mustered the strength to save him in such a dire circumstance left the enderman feeling more sure.

He could live with being seen as Tommy's. If anything, the boy laying such a claim on him felt like the enderman had passed some sort of test. He felt like he had earned Tommy's loyalty, that his protection of the boy had earned him protection in return.

Feeling more at ease, Ranboo relaxed onto the carpet, continuing his idle petting as he slipped into a light nap.

Dream groaned in pain as consciousness graced his battered body. Everything felt sore and heavy, his body caked in sweat, ash, and blood. As he cracked his eyes open, he found himself in what looked like a hole carved into rough blackstone.

The ground around him felt warm to the touch and he could distantly hear the sound of lava. The only way into this room was what looked to be a door made out of obsidian bars. It was locked tight with rows of similarly barred rooms lining the blackstone brick hall. He must have been locked in some sort of prison in the piglin bastion after they knocked him out.

Slowly picking himself up, Dream heard the sound of something dragging on the rough stone. His limbs felt heavy and something was digging into his wrists and ankles. Looking down, he found thick chains wrapped around each limb.

The cuffs looked to be made of obsidian, digging harshly into his skin and leaving bruises and cuts. The chains themselves left him with barely a foot and a half of slack between his ankles, and half that length for his hands. Even worse, he had been stripped of everything, reduced to only the tattered remains of his pants.

Checking his inventory, he was shocked to see it was empty. He had literally nothing on him, not even the clothes on his back. This did not bode well at all, given his situation.

The mobs all hated him for some reason and the piglins were basically barbaric players. That meant that they could get *creative* when it came to making him suffer, a fate Dream had no intention of allowing to play out.

Luckily, the admin was never without a trick up his sleeve, even when he had no sleeves to speak of. He may have been stripped of his stuff, but he wasn't powerless. All he needed was a little blood and a smidge of power.

Without hesitation, Dream used his teeth to tear open the skin of his thumb, using the coalescing blood to draw some sigils on the ground. It began to glow with power the more he drew, that power reflected in his eyes. He grinned like a maniac as he added the finishing touch: a bloody smiley face right in the centre.

“Come to me, my puppet,” he muttered, the grin never faltering. “Come to your master!”

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

The next chapter will likely be up in 2-3 weeks but who knows. Stay chaotic everybody.

The song this week is Goddess by Written by Wolves

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Casual violence for the betterment of society, localized exile and deep thoughts, and divine intervention

Chapter Notes

So once more, this chapter is a reversal of roles once more. This chapter's once more written by Author_of_Insanity101 and beta'd by myself. She made a valiant attempt to hold herself back long enough to allow me to contribute but I could not gather myself in time and so this creation is once more her wonderful words. Show her some serious love!!!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

A massive feast was being held in the Bastion to celebrate the capture of the Green Monster. Tables were laden with various mushroom dishes and pounds of hoglin steaks. Netherwart juice was being passed around to everyone and the air was full of reverie

Of course, even in their reverie, the piglins remained vigilant. Guards watched the outer walls to defend their home from any threats. They would get their chance to celebrate at the next rotation, with a similar spread of food to enjoy. Until then, some of the servant class piglins would deliver them meals so they could remain alert and at their best.

One such servant class was bringing a plate to the inner shoat chamber, the one where the Golden Runt and his pet had been placed. The Brute that had been able to hold the runt had complained about how light and tiny he was, even for a runt. He needed more meat on his bones, so hopefully this would help.

As the servant class approached the shoat chamber, they were surprised to see the runt's enderman walking down the hall and away from its master. The servant class frowned at that, clicking their tongue and chutting in an ender call that usually worked on the other ender pets.

It didn't this time.

Frowning, the servant class set the food aside, following the ender while continuing to chut and click. Why was this creature wandering so far from its owner? The Brutes who brought it

and the Golden Runt in spoke of the creature's loyalty and how it cried out for its Master. If that were the case, then what was it doing?

The ender meandered through the bastion, moving deeper and deeper into the bowels of the building. That was really confusing for the servant class. Ender preferred open spaces where they could teleport and wander. This one was getting further and further from the surface. In fact, the only thing that was down this deep in the Bastion was the...

The Dungeon.

The servant class grabbed the ender's strange garb, digging in their hooves and attempting to stop the creature. While they weren't strong enough to be a warrior, they were still strong enough to not be a runt, but it wasn't enough to stop the Golden Runt's ender.

It hissed and cried in the way ender did when one was "aggroed", as the Players called it. Then a large axe manifested in its hand and it attempted to bring it down. The servant class dodged, barely, and squealed as loud as it could. The ender was savage and armed! They needed brutes!

Immediately after their cry, several brutes came pouring out of each hallway, all of them armed with golden axes. They surrounded the ender, who continued to brandish its weapon like some feral creature.

"Don't hurt it!" the servant class insisted. **"It belongs to the golden runt!"**

"Why is it armed?!" One of the Brutes snorted angrily.

"Why is it not with its Master?" Another demanded, confused.

A third, one of the older Brutes with a clouded eye and a broken tusk, narrowed their eyes at the ender. This one was of the most well respected veterans of their Bastion, one who had gone hoof to hoof with players and lived to tell about it. While they weren't as strong or well known as The Blood God, their power and strength were to be respected.

"The Golden Runt's ender had different eyes." They pointed at the ender, who snapped savagely at the extended claw. **"One like blood, one like grass. This one has ones like other ender."**

"But it is the split colour," another pointed out, gesturing to the ender's black and white skin and hair. **"This is the Golden Runt's ender."**

The veteran's good eye narrowed further and they sniffed the air. When they did, they snorted hard, spitting in disgust.

"Magic. Bad magic. Puppet magic. Ender is not acting like good ender because it is not acting."

Even the servant class could figure out what was going on with those words. Something was controlling the Golden Runt's ender and sending it to the dungeon. Considering that there

was only a single creature down there at the moment, it didn't take a genius to figure out who was doing the controlling.

Now knowing what was going on, they just needed to break the control. Moving as one, the piglins swarmed the ender, wrenching the axe from its hands and wrestling it to the ground. From there, they tore away its garments, trying to find the seal.

Puppet magic needed a seal to work. A sigil carved into the skin of the victim that would give the caster complete control over them. Those with strong wills could fight it, maintain their sense of self and fight back. However, those with weak wills would fall prey to the magic easily, turning them into nothing more than slaves.

The Ender thrashed, cried, and bit several times, attempting to pull free as it was stripped. But the Brutes could not find the sigil. Soon, only one garment remained: the cloth collar the Golden Runt placed on it.

A brute winced in apology before tearing through the cloth, which finally revealed the sigil. On the back of the ender's neck, hidden beneath its hair, was a smile carved into its flesh. The same smile that was on the mask the Green Monster wore.

~~(The same smile carved onto the back of Tommy's neck)~~

The ender's struggles redoubled as its neck was bared, attempting to get away. One of the brutes forced its face onto the blackstone, pinning it in place before swiping its claws across the ender's neck. It screamed in pain, then collapsed into a limp heap.

The sigil was broken. And with it, the spell.

Dream screamed in pain, clutching his neck as if he had been the one to have his skin torn. The magic circle's power died and he felt his connection to his puppet being severed. He panted hard, trying to centre himself and regain his senses.

Damn those pigs! How *dare* they interfere?! How dare they take his puppet from him?!

He had to try again. Ranboo may no longer be a viable option, but maybe he could try Tommy again. After the fall from the bridge and the injuries he sustained, the boy *had* to be weakened. Maybe even weak enough to fall in line like a good little bitch.

He prepared to try the spell again, but that's when the door to his cell was thrown open. He looked up, then his world exploded into pain. A pain that didn't stop even as the world began to fade to black.

A 3X3 chunk area was both surprisingly big and yet still so small.

After arriving at George's hobbit hole summer home, he and Sapnap had collared themselves as promised. Doing so erected a border only they could see, preventing them from going

beyond it. They set up a fence around the border so that everyone could see they were contained, then set about making their enclosure more habitable.

At the moment, they were going through the materials George had in his chests, hoping to find enough wood and wool to make a bed for Sapnap. Unfortunately, there wasn't much in there. Just moss, some mushrooms, a bit of food, and lots of dirt and grass.

"Is this really all you have, George?" Sapnap asked, flipping open another chest to find a similar assortment of items.

"Unfortunately. Most of my stuff burned after..." George's voice trailed off a bit.

"Oh yeah." Sapnap looked up from his searching, eyes running over the entire base. "I forgot. The entire reason Tommy was exiled was because he... burned this place down"

The two of them stopped their search, both just staring at the hobbit hole. Despite having been burnt down, everything looked perfectly in place and intact. It was as if the fire never happened at all. The air didn't even smell of smoke, instead smelling of fresh moss and mushrooms.

"Y'know..." George let out, leaning against the wall, "I was upset that the place burned. I'd worked hard on it and was so proud of what I accomplished, only to watch it burn. And that's without the added indignity of netherrack dicks in my front yard."

Sapnap moved to join his friend, leaning on the wall next to him.

"But Dream... He almost seemed... happy." George grimaced as he said this. "I couldn't see his face because of his mask but... but the way he was standing as he watched it burn, it was like... like he'd won the lottery."

"Because he had," Sapnap realised, horror dawning on him. "He was looking for an excuse to get to Tommy, a reason to bash L'Manberg. Your summer home burning... it might as well have been the lottery."

George looked sick at the idea, slowly sliding to the ground and putting his head in his hands.

"I never wanted this..." he whimpered into his hands. "All I really wanted was an apology and maybe some help getting things back in order. But Dream... he just promised me he'd take care of things and... and I was just happy he was paying attention to me again..."

Sapnap sat down too, wrapping an arm around George's shoulders.

"At least you didn't aid in Dream's torture of Tommy."

George's head shot up and the blaze winced, turning away in shame.

"During Exile... Dream would let Tommy into the Nether. He could walk along the Nether Highway, use the bridges... but he was never allowed to go through the portals. I..." Sapnap ran his fingers through his hair, shame welling deep inside him. "I was so blind to what was going on that when Dream suggested a 'prank' for Tommy, I was onboard."

“What did you do?” George whispered.

“Dream had me on VC on his communicator. I made a show of jumping into and out of the Nether portal, grandly describing all of the stupid Christmas decorations we were hanging up. The big Christmas tree, all the presents... and I kept punctuating it with how awesome it was and that Tommy could come see...”

Shame and anger boiled over and Sapnap slammed his fist on the ground. The wood cracked slightly and the blaze just screamed.

“How could I have been so stupid?!”

“Hey.” George caught his arm, shaking his head. “We were both stupid. Dream used us both against Tommy and we let him.”

Sapnap reached up with his free hand, feeling the gold of his collar. He’d hated the idea of being collared at first, only doing it to appease the others and support George. But now...

“We deserve this... don’t we?”

George didn’t say anything. He just leaned on the Blaze and closed his eyes, offering his friend some comfort.

Outside of the summer home, XD hovered unseen in front of the window. They had overheard everything, igniting their rage deep in their core. It wasn’t directed at Sapnap or George, but at the one who had turned them into unwitting accomplices to such heinous abuse.

It was XD’s personal rule that they would not meddle in the affairs of mortals. Sure, they would play around with George from time to time and they would make an appearance if and when someone broke one of the Server Laws, but other than that, they didn’t get involved.

But they couldn’t just sit around and watch this time. The Universe had spoken and declared Dream its enemy. It had also declared that Tommyinnit was to be protected and cherished. Thus, XD would act. But first...

With a wave of their hand, XD summoned an oak tree, planting it within the fence border of the cottagecore prison. With another wave of their hand, two sheep, two cows, and two chickens all manifested within the fence. A small chest with various seeds, a bucket of water, and food stuffs would ensure that those contained within could be self-sufficient

Satisfied that they had provided for those seeking penitence for their actions, XD turned their attention elsewhere. They could feel something in the air, something dark and forbidden. It felt like Black Magic, and XD could think of only one creature brazen enough to wield such arts.

With a snap of their fingers, XD vanished from sight, the gifts they left behind the only proof they’d ever been there to begin with.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

The next chapter will likely be up in 2-3 weeks but who knows anymore.

My leg hurts today so vibes but I did just watch Phasmophobia streams with my brother. Also, I curse the gods who stuck me with an Overwatch hyperfixation of all things but we rock on.

The song this week is the cover of "The Music of the Night" from Phantom of the Opera by Colm McGuinness

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

A trip to the vets, the dog days, and the reckoning

Chapter Notes

This chapter, as is a current trend, written once more by my lovely compatriot Author_of_Insanity101 and edited by yours truly. She deserves all the love and respect for her dedication and inspiration. (And between you and I, dear readers, she's already made a start into the next chapter). It is entirely due to her

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo groaned as he slowly came to. His body felt sore, especially his neck. He blinked a bit, trying to remember what happened before. His brain felt like he was in a fog, the pain in his neck crawling up and into his skull. He went to rub his head, but found that his hands weren't moving the way he wanted them to.

As the world came into focus around him, Ranboo found himself laid out in what could generously be described as a stall in a stable. The walls were made of nether bricks with a low ceiling and the occasional glowstone growth hanging from it. The floors looked to be normal netherrack with patches of crimson nylium here and there.

The stall itself was closed off with nether brick fences and a crimson stem gate. There wasn't any type of furnishing in the stall, but the floor was lined with patchy crimson nylium as some form of comfort. There was also a random block of warped nylium, which was odd given that piglins actively avoided the warped forests.

Tentatively, Ranboo reached for the block, stopping when he saw his hands. His wrists were tied together with a lead, one that led to one of the sections of fencing in his stall. Seeing that made him chirp in distress, instinctively pulling on it before trying to chew at the knot with his teeth.

"Do not be afraid, youngling," the voice of an ender spoke up from the stall next to his. *"The binding does not mean pain. The binding is for security."*

Confusion broke through the wave of panic that had overtaken Ranboo. He turned to the source of the voice, chirping out a soft call. As he rose up onto his knees, he could peer through the bars of the fencing to see another ender. Like him, this ender was bound to one of

the posts, but they had their lead looped around their neck. They were toying with their own block of nylium, and they seemed to have various bandages wrapped around their limbs and torso.

“Oh, you are split-black-white, the ender claimed by red-loud-gold. You are as unique as the domesticators said you were.”

Ranboo blinked owlily, feeling a blush creep across his face. His tail whipped slightly as he reached for the block, holding it in his lap.

“Yes... this one thanks you for the compliment.”

The ender laughed lightly. *“I am called burning-nylium-warped.”*

“An accurate name from the looks of it.” Ranboo looked over the bandages, recognizing the smell of magma cream.

“Yes. I am cursed with the grace of a hoglin. I have injured myself many times in the lava wastes.” The ender chuckled a bit, turning the block in their hand. *“I am fortunate to have been taken. As a claimed, I will be cared for and protected.”*

Ranboo nodded at that but said nothing. Many ender did see being claimed as a great honour, especially if it was by Players. For netherborn Ender, being taken by the piglins must be seen as similarly positive. Then again, the promise of protection and food would make any passive mob complacent.

“Your happiness is celebrated,” he said after a bit. *“If I may ask, what is this place? I do not remember being here before.”*

burning-nylium-warped seemed to grimace a bit as he said that, claws digging into their block. *“Your loss of memory is not surprising. This is the animal healing ward on the outskirts of the Nether Waste Bastion. You were brought here by the domesticators for healing.”*

So he was basically in a vet’s office. At least that explained a few things. The lead on his wrists was likely the equivalent of a leash on your pet while they’re getting checked out. That meant that the stall he was in was essentially his kennel and the warped block was some sort of enrichment toy. But there were still a million questions running through his head.

“I did not require healing. It is red-loud-gold that requires healing. He is sick while I am healthy.”

burning-nylium-warped almost seemed sympathetic, then reached up and tapped their neck with a claw. Doing so lead Ranboo to do so himself, allowing him to feel something wrapped around his throat.

It wasn’t the bandanna Tommy had given him. Instead, it was a set of bandages wrapped snugly around his throat. There was extra padding on the back of his neck, padding that felt damp to the touch. Putting pressure on it made pain flare and Ranboo pulled back with a hiss.

He'd been hurt? How? Had something happened that he'd forgotten?

He began to pat himself down, looking for more injuries he may have missed. Doing so revealed a few bruises, as well as the terrifying fact that he was completely naked. Thankfully, his hybrid biology made it so that he technically didn't need clothes, but having grown up in the overworld, being naked filled him with shame and embarrassment.

Quickly, he summoned up his inventory, hoping for answers. Doing so revealed that all of his weapons, armour, and tools were also mysteriously missing. However, the rest of his stuff was left untouched, including his memory book.

Not wanting to think about the missing stuff just yet, he opened his book to see if there were any new entries.

"What is that?" the ender asked, nodding toward the book.

"My memory is very bad so I do my best to write down my memories. I am hoping that I wrote about how I was injured and why my things are missing." He gave a low, frustrated chirp. *"But I did not write anything."*

"If you wish it, I can tell you what the domesticators said about you."

Ranboo let out a loud *vwoop* in affirmation, practically clinging to the bars of the kennel. His tail wagged in excitement as he nodded, grateful for the offer. He kept his memory book out, ready to write down what happened so he wouldn't forget again.

"When you were brought in, the domesticators said that you had been under a curse. They called it puppet magic. Said the sigil was on your neck and they had to break the sigil to break the spell."

Ranboo paled at that, his hands going to his neck. Puppet magic? Someone had been... controlling him? Someone had carved something into his neck to put him under the spell? Was that why his memory was so bad?! Just what had he been made to do while under the spell?!

"Youngling?" *burning-nylium-warped* rose from where they were sitting, approaching the wall as they *vwooped* in concern. *"Youngling, are you okay?"*

"I... I don't know... I don't remember any sigil. I don't remember any time that I could have been marked..."

"I am sorry that I cannot offer comfort in that matter, but the mark is gone now. mask-smile-green cannot use you again."

That made Ranboo freeze. *"Did... did you say... mask-smile-green?"*

"Yes." the ender nodded. *"The domesticator said that you had its mark on your neck, the smile it wears. It tried to make you go to it, but you were stopped. The domesticators know of your loyalty to your Player, so they found the source of your disobedience."*

Ranboo barely heard the ender's explanation. His hands were shaking and the entire world felt like it was tilting. He'd had a smile carved into his neck... a mark that *Tommy* had as well. Dream had tried to turn Tommy into the same spineless puppet he had been. The idea made Ranboo feel sick and he collapsed onto the nylum, dry heaving in a panic.

Could Dream control Tommy like he had been controlled? What would he make Tommy do?! What if he was controlling Tommy right now?!

He had to get to Tommy.

In a panic, Ranboo began to tear at the lead with his teeth, frustrated and aggroed noises spilling from his mouth as he struggled to free himself. He managed to loosen the knot and practically shot up, throwing himself through the gate.

"TOMMY!!" he screamed, scrambling to look for the exit. "TOMMY!"

His cries drew the attention of the various ender and hoglins that were also in the kennel, along with a pair of piglins. Both of them had potions and scrolls hanging from their belts, suggesting that they were the piglin equivalent of veterinarians. Desperate, Ranboo rushed to them.

"Tommy! He has a sigil like mine!" He began pointing at his neck, then up in the direction of the Bastion. "Dream could be hurting him! Using him like he used me! You have to take me to him! We have to-!"

Something cracked across his back and the smell of a splash potion of weakness filled his nose. All of the strength leaked out of his body and he collapsed. As his eyes fluttered shut, he saw one of the vets scurrying off while the second began dragging him back to the kennel. He could only hope that they'd understood him.

The last thing he remembered was a gentle pat on the head before the world went dark once more.

Fran loved her Master. He was so kind to her, keeping her safe and always making sure she had food, shelter, and enrichment. He took her on walks all the time and protected her during the Pet Wars. Her master was such a kind individual who cared for everyone, especially his mate, the Lemon Man, and the golden pup Tommy.

Her Master had told her about the pup's exile and how he had extended an invitation to come live with them. She had been excited by the prospect of a new pup. They would have been a great companion to play with her. There was even a room in her Master's home made especially for the pup. He never came to take the room, which left Fran sad for both the pup and her Master.

But now, things were different.

Fran's Master came and collected her along with the Lemon Man. Both of them were covered in bandages and smelled strongly of potions. Both of them were also wearing armour and wielding shining weapons. She whined at the sight, more than a little worried about their condition.

"We're okay, Fran," her Master insisted, scratching her behind the ear in that perfect spot he always seemed to find. "Listen, we need your help, okay?"

Fran barked, wagging her tail excitedly. The Lemon Man then bent down and pet her head. They weren't as good as her Master was, but their touch was nice and always made her smell clean.

"You remember Tommy, right Fran?" the Lemon Man asked.

Fran barked again, nodding her head before accepting more affection.

"Well we need your help to find him, okay? Specifically, we need your help in hunting down the person who knows where Tommy is."

That gave Fran pause. Even though she remained mostly in her Master's base these days, she had heard about the abuse and pain that the pup had been made to endure at the hands of the masked one. The last news she had received on the matter said that the pup was safe with the Blood God's polar bears. Was that not the case?

"Ponk and I tried to bring Tommy back here so we could help him, but we were attacked," her Master explained, rubbing one of his arms that was covered in bandages. "Now Tommy and Ranboo are both trapped with Dream and there's only one person who can tell us where they went."

The masked monster had the pup?! Instantly, Fran's hackles were raised and she was snarling. As a purebred Samoyed, she was a massive dog with a very deep growl. She was not to be trifled with when angry, and right now she was very angry.

"I think she's on board," the Lemon Man declared, backing away from her.

"We need to find Punz," her Master told her. "Can you sniff him out for us?"

Fran nodded and immediately took off out of the base. Punz was the name of the white and gold human. The one who lived in the tower near all the other players. Once they were there, she could get the scent and hunt him down. She would track him to the edge of the world border if she had to.

Whatever it took to save the golden pup from the masked monster.

Punz's pickaxe broke through the obsidian frame of his nether portal, shattering the swirling purple vortex like cheap glass. Once it was no longer functioning, the white-clad mercenary all but sagged on the broken frame in relief.

Never in his entire career had he experienced anything like that. Every single mob in the entire Nether had locked onto him and Dream, aiming for the kill. And it wasn't just some piglin brutes or lone ghast. No, it was *every single nether mob in existence!*

An entire hoard of ghasts, normal piglins, zombie piglins, skeletons, magma cubes, hoglins, zoglins... hell, Punz even saw blazes and wither skeletons pouring out of a nearby fortress. Dream had gone down pathetically easy and Punz had been on the run for what felt like hours before he finally managed to reach his portal. He was exhausted, starving, filthy, and he had maybe two and a half hearts from all the attacks he'd taken.

Pickaxe tumbling from his fingers, Punz limped his way over to his bed, his armour fading away into his inventory as he flopped onto the mattress. Once he got some sleep, he'd repair his armour and weapons, get some food and potions ready, then see about rescuing Dream. The admin hadn't died yet, so he was likely still alive.

Piglins would occasionally hold players hostage for gold, but there was no way Punz was going to use any of his treasure on Dream. Of course if it came to it, he could probably bill the man. Provided Dream managed to get himself out of whatever weird slump he was in.

Punz was just starting to drift off to sleep when he heard a crash on the bottom floor of his tower. Instincts kicked in and he was up in a flash, armour on and tomahawk at the ready. Already, he could hear footsteps running up the stairs to his room. He braced himself just as the doors were broken down by a massive white dog.

Caught off guard, Punz brought his axe down on the dog, only for his weapon to be caught in the beast's teeth. They began a game of tug-o-war for the weapon, which gave Punz the chance to see the golden collar wrapped around the dog's neck. Only one domesticated dog wore a golden collar, which identified it immediately.

"Siccing your dog on me, Sam?!" he called out as he continued to try and reclaim his axe. Why did this have to happen when he was still so exhausted?! "You better have a good explanation for this!"

From the doorway, both Sam and Ponk emerged. Both were armed to the teeth and clad in both armour and bandages. From the looks of utter contempt on their faces, this was not some spur of the moment play or prank. This was premeditated.

"I could say the same thing to you, Punz," Sam snarled, gripping his trident in both hands. "Teaming up with Dream, sabotaging the nether highway, killing us, taking Tommy."

"You've got a lot to answer for, Punz!" Ponk declared, pointing one of their hoes at the merc.

Punz laughed, kicking Fran hard enough to free his axe from her grip.

"And you think *you two* stand a chance against me?!" He twirled the axe in his hand. "I'll take another canon life from all of you and take Fran's collar as a trophy!"

He charged at them both, but then the world began to spin. His eyes widened as his hunger and exhaustion hit him all at once. No, no, no!! He couldn't faint here!! Not now!!

Before he could even do anything, Fran tackled him to the ground, pinning him against the wooden floors of his tower. Sam and Ponk closed in on him, looking down their noses at the merc before the former kicked Punz's axe out of range.

"So much for you boast," Ponk snorted, lifting one of his hoes. "Why don't you take a nap?"

The hoe came down hard on his skull and Punz was out in an instant.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

The next chapter will be up when it is written, possibly in short order as the last several have been, but frankly I personally have no concrete knowledge on the matter.

My next round of assignments are coming due in short order so yay? I'm not fond of evidence to the passage of time so this is very disconcerting for me.

My song recommendation of the week is Inertia by AJR

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Reflection and regrets, violations of the Hippocratic Oath, and a loss of faith

Chapter Notes

So everyone (at least those who check these), there has been an update to story tags so just be aware.

This chapter was written once more by Author_of_Insanity101 and she has, as always, written a wonderful. In full disclosure, this chapter was written several days ago but I've been busy so today up it goes. Show her the love she deserves!!!

Now, I'm going to go take a nap.

(Slight edits: Jan 2nd, 2024)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

This was by far one of the most inefficient manhunts that Phil had ever taken part in, and he had been in more than his fair share. There was little coordination, everyone was arguing over trails and potential evidence, and sometimes the arguments weren't even related to the hunt! It made the elytrian feel like he wanted to pull his hair out from frustration alone.

After listening to Quackity get into yet *another* shouting match with Bad over some prints leading away from spawn, Phil broke away from the group to clear his head. His wings ached to take flight, a feeling that had grown exponentially since coming to the Dream SMP. After the explosion that mutilated one beyond repair, he'd been grounded, which did nothing for his already deteriorating mindset.

Needing to be some semblance of airborne, Phil climbed up one of the many trees in the forest, perching himself on the top before taking a deep breath. He spread his wings to let them feel the window, hoping it would help to calm his mind. At the very least, it drowned out everything going on below.

Why was everything such a mess? Why had he ever allowed things to get this bad? He should have checked on Tommy during his exile.

No, he should have never let exile happen in the first place.

He should have never taken that damn sword and killed his son. He should have talked Wilbur down from blowing up L'Manberg. He should have gone with Techno when he went to help the boys with their revolution.

He should have been a better father.

Could he even *call* himself a father? He was always off on some sort of adventure, either exploring various Hardcore worlds or conquering other worlds with Techno. Sure he may have provided food, clothes, and shelter for Wilbur and Tommy, but he was never there.

Phil slumped onto the branch, feeling tired and drained. He sat down, rubbing his face before taking off his hat to rub his head. After a moment, he sighed, putting his hat back on.

Why was he even doing this? As much as he wanted to hunt Dream down to sate his lust for vengeance, what was the point? He shouldn't be wasting his time on a pointless hunt that wasn't bearing any fruit when his son was injured, sick, and sleeping in a Gods damned barn!

He pulled out his communicator, having turned it off to avoid the spamming messages from everyone in this worthless manhunt. He flicked the power switch before turning it to private messages.

Messaging Tommy directly was fruitless, (he'd tried when this whole mess started) so he messaged Techno instead. The piglin saw Tommy as a little brother even with everything that had been going on, which was why Phil vouched for him during the meeting. If anyone could and would protect the boy during this time, it was Technoblade.

[You whispered to Technoblade: Hey Tech, how's Tommy doing? Is he feeling any better?]

It was an achingly long time before Techno messaged back. It may have just been a few minutes, but they dragged on for hours.

[Technoblade whispered to you: dunno]

Phil blinked, confused. He read the message again, rubbed his eyes, then read it one more time.

[You whispered to Technoblade: What do you mean you don't know?]

Once again, it took a long time for Techno to reply. Far too long.

[Technoblade whispered to you: animals wouldn't let me in]

[Technoblade whispered to you: ranboo told me to fuck off]

[Technoblade whispered to you: then sam and ponk came]

[Technoblade whispered to you: took both of them]

Phil's eyes went wide at that. He flipped back to the main chat, looking for any signs that someone had arranged for Tommy to be moved. He couldn't see anything outside of random messages between the search party about not finding Dream and there wasn't any mention of Sam or Ponk. In fact, thinking back on it, the two had been absent from the big meeting.

Frustrated, Phil turned back to the communicator.

[You whispered to Technoblade: WHAT DO YOU MEAN THEY TOOK BOTH OF THEM?!]

His leg was fidgeting visibly as he anxiously waited for a response. His wings were puffed out and a few angry, worried chirps were slipping out of his mouth.

[Technoblade whispered to you: they came, threatened me, the animals let them in, then they left with the boys]

[Technoblade whispered to you: ponk's a doctor so theseus is in good hands]

Phil was sputtering as he furiously typed out his message.

[You whispered to Technoblade: WHY ARE YOU JUST ACCEPTING THIS?! THAT'S MY SON! YOUR SOUNDER!! YOUR RUNT!!]

Surprisingly, this reply was instantaneous.

[Technoblade whispered to you: yeah, and we failed him]

[Technoblade whispered to you: he chose to go with them]

[Technoblade whispered to you: and frankly, we lost any say in what happens to him a long time ago]

Phil stared at his communicator, those last words bouncing around in his skull. He lowered the device, feeling like he'd just been slapped in the face.

Techno was right. What right did he have to decide what happened to Tommy? He hadn't cared up until now, hadn't put in the effort to be a father. Even when all this shit came to light, his first instinct was to hunt down Tubbo and demand answers. He hadn't even looked in the barn or tried to visit his son.

Even now, he chose fighting over his son...

But Sam and Ponk... they'd gone to Tommy. They *chose* Tommy... and Tommy chose them in turn. They had put him first, something Phil constantly failed to do.

Phil leaned back against the tree as the sky darkened above him. The gentle fall of rain hid the tears in his eyes.

Sam stood in front of Punz, towering over the captive mercenary as Ponk absolutely tore apart the tower. The man before him was chained to a chair, arms locked on the arms of the chair and his legs similarly attached to its feet. Considering Punz's resourcefulness, neither he nor Ponk wanted to risk the merc cutting himself free with some hidden knife, thus chains in lieu of rope.

Of course, the two had raided the man's inventory the second he was unconscious, which was why there was currently a large pile of crossbows, knives, swords, and axes being guarded by

Fran. It was still shocking that someone could have that many weapons on them. Then again, Punz was a mercenary, and a damn good one too.

By this point, Punz had been awake for a few minutes. Upon realising his predicament and giving an experimental struggle, he had proceeded to stare down Sam in some attempt to intimidate him.

It wasn't working.

"I'm not finding anything!" Ponk called as he finished dumping out another chest from Punz's storage system. "He's got a fuckton of diamonds, gold, emeralds, even netherite ingots though! Like way more than any normal Player should have."

Punz just smirked a bit, proud of his treasures. Sam felt disgusted.

"You're not a miner, so I doubt you went and collected all that yourself." The creeper crossed his arms, furrowing his brow. "Let me guess, that's all the treasures Dream gave you to make you sell your soul."

"Last time I checked, he paid you a not-so-insignificant amount of money to do a job too," Punz countered, his smirk never waning. "How's that any different from this?"

Sam hissed, baring his teeth as he pressed forward, slamming his pitchfork into the wall inches from Punz's face. That only made the captive merc smile wider. Fran barked once, pulling Sam from his rage. He yanked his pitchfork free, stepping back.

"For your information, I'm not going through with the project."

Sam had even burned all of the treasures he had been paid to build that Prime-forsaken prison. He already had plans to go and dismantle what little outline he had set up once Tommy was safe. *Only* once Tommy was safe.

"Dream's not gonna like that," Punz said in an almost singsong voice. "Do you *really* want to get on the admin's bad side?"

This time, Sam didn't rise to the bait. He had to stay in control. If he let Punz continue to get under his skin, then the merc would win.

"I found something!" Ponk called out as they joined Sam. "Lots of correspondence between him and Dream. Coordinates, maps, and what look to be experiment notes."

There was a table close to where Punz was chained up and Ponk quickly dumped everything they found on its surface. Papers, letters, and books all scattered across it, along with at least a dozen quills and some ink sacs.

(Among those books was one that had a Totem of Undying engraved on the cover, along with writing in what looked to be galactic.)

"Anything on where they may have taken Tommy?" Sam asked, pouring over the maps.

"Any hints or clues?"

“From what I can tell, the coordinates are meet-up places scattered across the server. I’ve looked them up on the maps and most of them just lead out into the wilderness.” Ponk grimaced beneath their balaclava. “Like tens of thousands of blocks away from civilization.”

Sam growled, slamming his fist on the table in frustration, knocking several books and papers off its surface. (One of them was that engraved book, which was conveniently hidden beneath some of the papers.)

“We don’t have time to be scouring the wilderness on some wild goosechase! Dream’s already had Tommy for far too long! We need to get him back now!”

“Well then,” Ponk turned their attention from the table to Punz’s bound form, “luckily we have Dream’s personal stooge here to tell us exactly where they are.”

The mercenary met their gaze, straightening up in his chair. His fists clenched and he looked to be bracing himself, though his facade of power and confidence never wavered. Even as Sam and Ponk closed in on him, he didn’t so much as flinch.

“Do you really think you can get me to talk?” Punz had to laugh at the idea. “I’m the best there is at what I do for a reason. I don’t sell out clients, especially powerful ones like Dream.”

Now it was Ponk’s turn to laugh, a dark, mirthless laugh that sent a chill down Sam’s spine. Even Punz looked slightly unnerved by the sound before carefully schooling his features. The masked doctor pulled their balaclava off of his face, revealing a wicked grin and black eyes that were brimming with sadistic intent.

“Power...”

Ponk held out their mask which Sam took on reflex. This freed his partner’s hands to allow them to do whatever it was they had planned.

“You want to talk about power, Punz?” They flicked their wrist, a scalpel appearing in a small flash of light. They toyed with it a bit as they spoke. “Let me tell you about my power. Being a doctor gives me the power of life and death over my patients. Sure you can chug a healing potion and you’ll *feel* better, but it’s a temporary balm at best.”

Ponk began walking around Punz’s chair, twirling the scalpel between their fingers as the prisoner struggled to keep an eye on them. The entire time, the Lemon City doctor just kept talking.

“Doctors are the ones who fix the damage. We’re the ones who stitch wounds close, set broken bones, and provide *real* medicine for illnesses. We’re the ones who keep track of *every single hybrid* that ever comes into existence, what they need to thrive, and what they must avoid. We are the one person on every server with more authority than even the Admins.”

In a blink, Ponk turned in their heel, throwing the scalpel so it was embedded in the chair right in between Punz’s legs. A tiny noise escaped the captive merc’s mouth before he could

swallow it. Ponk's grin grew a little wider.

"But that's not why we're powerful, Punz. We're powerful because not only can we heal you... we can *destroy* you."

Ponk summoned a lead, testing it out before approaching the captive merc. They began tying it around the man's upper right arm, tight enough to cut off circulation. Panic began to hit the merc and his struggles redoubled.

"Hey, what are you doing?!" He turned to Sam, who remained a passive observer of everything. "Sam stop them! Don't just stand there?"

"Where's Tommy?"

Punz choked on his tongue as Ponk checked the knot on the rope, taking a step back. They then began going through their inventory, pulling out a netherite axe and a torch.

"Heating the blade will lower the chances of infection," they muttered, holding the torch to the blade to heat the netherite.

"SAM!!"

"Where's Tommy?" Sam repeated, not moving an inch.

"I..." The merc's eyes darted between Sam, the blade, and the rope on his arm. "I can't..."

Ponk banished the torch with a flick of their wrist, their axe blade glowing with heat. They lined it up with Punz's arm as the merc continued to thrash hard. The chains remained unyielding.

"Stop this! PLEASE!!"

"Where's Tommy?"

"I DON'T KNOW!!"

Sam's eyes narrowed. "Not good enough."

Ponk swung his sword and there was a loud thunk, followed by a pained scream from Punz. The axe had cut clean through the merc's elbow joint, as well as the wooden arm of the chair. They were both just sitting on the ground, the severed limb bleeding sluggishly. The stumpy remains of the merc's arm was similarly bleeding thanks to the rope tied in place.

"You... you bastard!" Punz screamed, practically frothing at the mouth from rage and pain. "My arm!! You took my arm!!"

Ponk didn't reply. Instead, they picked up the fallen limb with their axe, tossing it into the fireplace to get rid of it. They also summoned a bucket of water, sticking the axe into it to cool it off and clean it. The water turned a tepid red colour before Ponk pulled their weapon

free, setting it aside before untying the rope still on the stump. The wound began to bleed in earnest as the doctor began to tie the rope around the merc's other arm.

Realising the mad doctor wasn't going to stop at just one limb, Punz started shaking and thrashing. He was visibly getting weaker and paler from blood loss, or maybe it was just from terror. Either way, the merc's confidence was shattered.

"Wait, wait, WAIT! Stop! STOP!!"

"Where's Tommy?" Sam asked one last time.

"I DON'T KNOW! I SWEAR I DON'T KNOW!"

"You expect us to believe that?"

"IT'S THE TRUTH!" He began spilling his guts in a blind panic. "Dream and I went down to grab him and the enderman, but we were attacked by an entire bastion of piglins! Dream went down and I spent hours just trying to escape from the hoards of nether creatures after my head!! I haven't heard from Dream since so I assumed he was being held prisoner in that bastion!!"

Both Sam and Ponk were frozen as they processed what they had been told. By this point, both of them had caught on to the blatant favouritism that the mobs showed toward Tommy, so the idea of a bastion coming to Tommy's defence was not completely far-fetched. Sam also knew from experience that even a hardened warrior like Dream could be overwhelmed and overtaken by a bastion's worth of aggroed piglin brutes.

However, there was also another issue to consider. Tommy was in no condition to escape the nether on his own, and that was before the explosion on the bridge. Add that to the uncertainty of Ranboo's condition in the wake of the attack and there was a more than likely chance that both of them were still in the nether somewhere.

"Sam..." Ponk let out an expression of horror on his face.

"Yeah, I just realised it myself."

The extreme heat of the nether would help to burn off Tommy's fever, but the dry air would not help his bronchitis. On top of that, the nether was the furthest thing from safe and sanitary, even if the mobs were protecting the boy. Dream may not be a factor (or at least they prayed he wasn't) but Tommy's life was still very much in danger.

"I'll get medical supplies and powdered snow," Ponk declared, putting his axe away. "You get as many blocks as we need to repair the bridge and get into that Bastion."

"We should take Punz's gold too," Sam insisted, already heading for the storage chests. "Hopefully we can trade it for the boys without having to resort to violence."

They quickly split up to get everything they needed, leaving Punz forgotten on his chair. The merc slumped in his chains, slowly feeling his hearts going down as he bled out. This would

be his first Canon death and the missing arm would remain as a death scar. His life as a mercenary was over and he knew it.

(Unbeknownst to any of the players, Fran stealthily made her way over to the fallen books and papers, taking the engraved book from where it had fallen. She tossed it out the window where a fox was quick to snatch it up, scurrying away with its prize.)

XD hovered unseen in front of the massive bastion bordering the Player-made nether highway, watching the piglins go about their day. They phased easily through the blackstone walls, making their way to the innermost chamber where TommyInnit was recovering.

The boy was sleeping fitfully, sweating from fever while shivering from chills. He coughed wetly even in his sleep, but showed no signs of awakening. A piglin was with him, one of the servant class that was carefully wiping the boy's brow before trying to feed them some thin broth.

When the piglin tilted the boy's head up so he could properly drink without choking, XD's eyes widened behind their mask. On the back of the boy's neck was a sigil that *reeked* of forbidden magic. The sigil itself was one they recognized as belonging to the fallen admin, more proof of that disgusting creature's transgressions.

Remaining unseen, XD reached out, swiping a thumb over the sigil like it was dirt to be wiped away. When they pulled their hand away, the mark was gone, the skin smooth and unblemished. They nodded in satisfaction, then slipped out of the room.

The piglins would keep the boy safe until those Players came for him. From the whispers of the Universe, Awesamdude the Creeper and Ponk the Human had been recognized as caretakers for the boy and were actively working to recover him. That meant that XD could focus on punishing the one responsible for everything.

The Server God began to sink downward, deep into the bowels of the Bastion. They went all the way down until they reached the deepest pit in the dungeons. The cell was more like a hole in the ground, devoid of light save for a tiny sliver that slipped through the slats on the lone trap door. From the bloody trail leading to this oubliette, this had not been the man's original cell. He must have done something to merit being thrown in here.

Slowly, XD made themselves known, their body glowing with a soft golden light. It illuminated the space, making its occupant whine in pain and try to shield itself from the light.

The vile creature was an absolute mess. Heavy chains were attached to its limbs and neck, bruised and gashes decorating its body. Its hands looked like all of its fingers had been broken and its legs looked like they had been snapped in several places. Someone must have applied potions to it because it was healing, likely so that it couldn't escape its prison by dying.

“X...D...” the prisoner slurred through a swollen face, lifting its head. It smiled weakly, revealing missing teeth and bloody gums. “You... came... for me...”

“Yes, I did.”

The man did its best to sit up, groaning and whimpering with every movement. As it leaned against the wall, its smile grew wider. XD snapped their fingers, the chains falling off of the creature before vanishing.

“Thanks... for... the rescue...” it said as it rubbed its wrists.

“You misunderstand.” XD gathered power in the palm of their hands, a swirling mass of purple and black. “This is not a rescue. This is punishment.”

Before the beast could say anything more, XD threw their power at it. The energy clamped around its neck and each of its limbs, forming thick manacles made of obsidian. The collar they had given to the hunting party manifested as well, vanishing from the inventory of the one holding it.

(Quackity would proceed to waste an entire day looking for it and accusing everyone of stealing it.)

These new bindings were tight and harsh, the rough material abrasive on the monster’s skin. Thick chains then began to manifest, connecting all five pieces together. The creature’s ankles were connected by about two feet of chain, the middle link attached to a long chain that was connected to the collar. The wrist manacles only had a single loop between them, the long chain threaded through said loop. The monster could move its hands up and down the entire length of the chain, but its hands would remain forever attached to it.

“What...” the thing gasped, looked stunned, horrified, and betrayed. “XD... Why?”

“Why?” Rage washed over the God and the golden aura turned a dark shade of red. ***“You dare to ask me why?!”***

The vile thing recoiled harshly but XD grabbed its new chains, pulling it closer so they were face to face.

“The crimes you have committed are too heinous and too numerous to recount. As such, the Universe has deemed you unworthy of your title, or your privileges as a Player. As of this moment, you are stripped of your power and will be left to the mercy of the server.”

Before the creature could try and lie or weasel its way out of its deserved punishment, XD forced their hand through its stomach. This was not a killing blow, nor was there any blood. This was XD tapping into the monster’s code, erasing its Admin status and blocking it from accessing any of its illegal dark magic.

(This also erased all traces of a certain book from Dream’s memory.)

When XD pulled its hand out of the thing’s stomach, it dropped to the ground, shivering and crying. It couldn’t even muster the strength to try and get up.

“Goodbye, Dream,” XD said as they slowly faded from existence. “I hope it was worth it to you.”

They didn’t bother to stick around after that. They had to return to the overworld and pick a new admin. Perhaps George would take up the post, once they were released from confinement. These thoughts pushed the Server God’s lingering feelings on their disgraced admin from their mind as they left the nether behind them.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Personally, I am swamped until at least next Monday so that is the literal earliest that another post can go up.

My song recommendation (don't, please save me, this is the only thing I have listened to working on homework, my brain is obsessed) is Jump Around by CG5

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

The most expensive medical visit (the other way around), the parents (to-be) come to town, and a cow and a book.

Chapter Notes

So this chapter has once again been written by Author_of_Insanity101 so she deserves all the love. This was also written a number of days ago but I, ever the problem, have been unavailable for the past several days. She is utterly wonderful and highly inspired so full kudos to her.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo had been visited by the Piglin vets a few times since he had been hit with that weakness potion. They never talked to him no matter how many times he tried to get answers, only doing whatever it was they were there to do before leaving him again. He hated it and it made him long to return to Tommy's side.

On the plus side, at least he wasn't in pain. The piglins didn't even seem upset about his outburst earlier, though he couldn't remember why he had been upset. *burning-nylium-warped* said he had been worried about his Master, but wouldn't explain anything more. Considering the preferential treatment the mobs kept giving the boy, Ranboo didn't think he had much to fear from them in regards to his friend.

He, on the other hand, was another story.

Since waking up for the second time in his kennel, the vets had begun to decorate him. Once they had deemed that whatever was wrong with his neck (another thing *burning-nylium-warped* kept mysteriously quiet about) had finally healed, he had been given a new collar.

Unlike the bandanna Tommy had put on him, this one was solid gold. It was slender, embossed with flowers made from white gold and a small loop at the very centre to keep it closed. The thing about it that shook Ranboo was that it was enchanted. Or perhaps cursed was the better term.

The collar had Curse of Binding on it.

According to his kennel neighbour, Curse of Binding was standard for those claimed by the piglins. They were, by nature, territorial creatures who would fight over resources, land, and even their domesticated pets. Cursing the collars on their Ender ensured that no one could take their collars and overwrite their claims.

After that, the piglins had brought more things for him to wear. Most of it had been jewellery, starting with golden shackles on his wrists and ankles with thin chains wrapped around his second toes and middle fingers. They weren't connected to each other, thankfully, but they were still heavy. These were also cursed, once again to ensure the claim on him couldn't be refuted.

His ears were pierced and golden hoops were slipped on, one for the left ear and three for the right, complete with an ear cuff. These, thank *Prime*, were not cursed. From there, they gave him something he was genuinely grateful for: a pair of pants.

They were made out of a golden yellow fabric, the panel around the stomach shimmering like it was made of actual gold. They only came to about halfway down his calves with similar panels wrapped around his leg. The pants themselves were soft and comfortable, very loose with a small hole specifically for his tail.

As a final touch, the piglins took his crown from his inventory, sliding it onto his head. From the way the two vets were snorting and nodding, Ranboo guessed they were satisfied with how he looked. Satisfied enough to finally remove him from the kennel.

Never in his life did Ranboo think he would be happy to be put on a leash. By this point, he had accepted that he was little more than a pet in the eyes of these piglins and if he was being removed from the healing ward, that meant he was being returned to his "owner." In other words, he was finally going to see Tommy again!

He followed the piglins without pulling on the lead attached to his collar, tail swishing anxiously as they moved deeper into the Bastion. When they finally reached those crimson doors leading to the room Tommy was in, Ranboo was surprised to see two massive Brutes guarding the entrance. Was this related to why he was in the vet's office? (He really should have written things down.)

The two brutes held the doors open, revealing Tommy still sleeping peacefully inside. Ranboo practically rushed forward, uncaring of the leash still attached to him, and scooped up his friend. The boy was sweating profusely and his face was scrunched up with discomfort, but he immediately wrapped his arms around the Enderman, whining in his sleep.

"I'm here, Tommy," he whispered, settling down on the ground before running his claws through the boy's hair. "I'm here. It's going to be okay, I promise."

The piglins, seemingly satisfied with this turn of events, plopped down a nether brick fence in the centre of the room. Ranboo's leash was tied to it, essentially tethering him to the room. While technically he could undo the lead and slip out, he didn't see the point. He was right where he needed to be and had no plans of leaving.

Ranboo knew that escaping from the Bastion simply wasn't possible, especially with Tommy's clearly worsening condition. The only way they'd leave is if someone came and got them out. He could only hope a rescue would come soon.

The nether highway was in even worse shape than Sam and Ponk had expected. Most of the roads had been completely destroyed, debris poking out of the lava below. What remained was a jagged remnant of a cobblestone path with branches broken off everywhere. It was a daunting task for anyone to tackle.

They didn't care.

Both of them taking a side, the two began placing down blocks of obsidian in tandem. Thankfully, Sam's supply of the blast-resistant block had been left untouched after he abandoned the prison project. (Though the outline he'd set out had been mysteriously taken down. He wasn't upset about it.)

Working together, they made steady progress across the lava and closer to the Bastion. Occasionally, they'd hear a ghast floating nearby, but not once did one try to shoot at them. The large creatures just continued to float around, content to ignore them. Even after weeks of the mobs ignoring everyone, it was still weird.

"Do you think they're in there?" Ponk questioned, glancing over at the Bastion as they got closer.

"I think that it's the only thing that makes sense," Sam replied, also eying the Bastion. "Though the second we step into their territory, the Brutes are going to be on us like wolves on a bone."

Ponk took a deep breath, looking out at the large bridge that served as the Bastion entrance. Steeling their nerves, they plopped down an Ender Chest, putting all of their weapons and armour into it. This left them with only the golden boots they were wearing to keep the piglins from attacking outright. (They weren't sure if that would still work with all of the mobs acting against their instincts, but the instinct was too ingrained to ignore)

Sam's netherite went into his own Ender Chest, leaving only his golden circlet. When they were done dumping their inventories, all they had were the obsidian to finish their project and as much gold as they could feasibly carry in their inventories.

"Ready?" Sam asked, holding out a hand.

Ponk took the offered hand, giving it a squeeze. "Ready."

Together, they formed a staircase that reached the bastion bridge, touching down onto the blackstone. The second their feet hit the ground, the front gates of the Bastion were thrown open. Brutes came pouring out, all of them wielding golden swords, axes, and crossbows. All of them were grunting and shouting in pigling, surrounding the pair and aiming their weapons.

Without hesitation, Sam and Ponk held up their hands, fingers splayed as they did their best to appear non-threatening. Leads were summoned and both of them were captured in less than a minute. Once the piglins were confident they were secure, the two players were escorted into the Bastion, the large gates slamming shut behind them.

Ghostbur's tongue was sticking out of the side of his mouth as he focused on the project in his hands. It was the stuffie that he had decided he was going to make for Tommy, something he had been working extra hard to remember. It had taken time, and a few tries to get the shape right, but he was finally happy with how it was turning out.

The stuffie was a blue cow, one stuffed with plenty of Friend's wool for extra comfort. The blue sheep had been super eager to help Ghostbur with his gift, even finding a pair of shears somewhere for him. There were buttons for the cow's eyes and different shades of blue for the hooves, nose, and patches. In a word, it looked cute.

"And... done!" Ghostbur set down his needle, holding out the stuffie for Friend to look at. "What do you think? Will Tommy like it? I added Blue to it so it would take all his sadness away."

Friend sniffed at the stuffie, then gave a small nod. *"I believe the golden lamb will appreciate this gift greatly. You have done well."*

"Aww, thanks buddy."

The lanky ghost got up, happily tucking the cow into his inventory. He then stretched, even though his non-corporeal form didn't get stiff, groaned in satisfaction, then lowered his arms with a smile.

"We should get going. I want to give Tommy his new gift as soon as possible!"

He began floating toward the entrance to his sewer home, flicking the lever to open the iron trap door. (No buttons. Nobody liked him around buttons.) As he slipped out into the oddly deserted streets of New L'Manberg, he was greeted by a fox sitting at the entrance.

"Oh, hello there." Ghostbur finished pulling Friend out of the hole before reaching out and petting the fox. He ended up leaving a blue stain on its fur, but the creature didn't seem to mind. "You're pretty far from the forest. What brings you here?"

The fox dropped something it had been carrying in its mouth, yipping almost like a dog waiting to play. Ghostbur chuckled at that, reaching down for the item to see what it was. He paused when he saw that it was a book, and a fancy one at that.

"What's this?"

Curiosity getting the better of him, Ghostbur picked up the book, flipping it upright in his hands. It was an old book that seemed to hum with power. It made his ethereal skin prickle to hold it. In fact, the longer he held it, the clearer his mind seemed to become.

The ghost's dopey grin slowly evened out, becoming an expression of grim determination. He opened the book, examining the pages and the galactic writing within. Being the son of the Goddess of Death, he knew how to read the script and knew exactly what he was holding.

With a snap, he shut the book, sliding it under his arm before summoning his communicator. The screen was cracked and the buttons had been dyed blue after a great deal of use. Despite being dead, his communicator still worked, something he was grateful for at this moment.

[You whispered to Ph1LzA: Phil, where are you? We need to talk]

His foot was bouncing on nothing as he waited for a response. After a bit, he finally got one.

[Ph1LzA whispered to you: What is it, Ghostbur? Can it wait?]

With a grim expression, Ghostbur typed out his reply.

[You whispered to Ph1LzA: No, Phil. It can't.]

[You whispered to Ph1LzA: I've waited long enough as is.]

[Ph1LzA whispered to you: Wil? Are you alright? You don't sound like yourself.]

Ghostbur couldn't help the wry chuckle that escaped him at that, shaking his head as he typed.

[You whispered to Ph1LzA: No, Phil. I haven't been alright in a long time.]

[You whispered to Ph1LzA: Phil...]

[You whispered to Ph1LzA: I need you to bring me back to life.]

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

I struggled writing the summary this time so my apologies about it.

Song recommendation of the chapter is A Little Theorising by The Stupendium.

Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Back to the Bastion, a reunion or two, and a fever

Chapter Notes

Once again, shout-out to my lovely co-author/beta, Author_of_Insanity101 for her work on the chapter. The entire last section is her wonderful work so send some love her way.

...so hi again everyone, sorry for disappearing for the past age, mental health and all that jazz. However, I should be back more consistantly now and I will promise that this work will never be abandoned.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Being captured by piglins was a hazard when one chose to venture into the nether, though it took a special brand of either bravery or stupidity to walk into a Bastion wanting to be captured. At the moment, Ponk had the feeling that they and Sam fell into the latter category.

The two of them were bound and on their knees (or at least Ponk was. Sam's Creeper physique left him with a body resembling a centaur's, though he was lowered so he was on the ground) in front of the gilded blackstone throne of the Bastion's leader. The large piglin sitting on the throne was about the same size as Technoblade, covered in scars and decked out in a plethora of gold.

"Why bring players here?" the leader questioned the soldiers keeping them prisoner, snorting in piglin. It made Ponk grateful that they had enough mastery of the tongue to hold a conversation.

"No weapons, no fighting," one of the Brutes explained, another holding out all of the gold that had been confiscated from their inventories. **"Only gold."**

"Sneak thieves?"

"No," Ponk quickly shot down, shaking their head. **"Not sneak thieves. Came to speak with Piglin Lord. Gold is offering."**

There was a chorus of surprised chuffs, the piglins not used to Players learning their tongue. Even the leader raised an eyebrow, switching from Piglin to Common.

“You speak our tongue.” The leader crossed their arms, their snout wrinkling as they eyed the two players. “Who are you?”

“We are Players from the Overworld,” Sam spoke up, grateful that they could now have a conversation with the piglins. “We’re here to--”

One of the Brutes smacked Sam hard upside the head with the butt of their golden axe. He cried out in pain, falling silent as several of the gathered piglins snorted in anger.

“Green creature silent!”

“Green is bad!”

“No Green!!”

“Wait!” Ponk cried out, realising where this was going. “We are not with Dream! Sam is a Creeper hybrid, an overworld mob. *That* is why he’s green! Please don’t hurt him!”

The leader raised one arm and the Brute stepped back, still looking at Sam with a disdainful glare. The leader then leaned forward on their throne, staring curiously at the Creeper hybrid. Sam lowered his head, trying to make himself seem as small and compliant as he could. Finally...

“Masked one,” the leader called out, turning to face Ponk. “You speak of green monster. Of Runt Defiler. How do you know it?”

Ponk swallowed hard, trying to steel their nerves. One slip up and they would both lose another Canon life. They had to get this right.

“We learned of the Defiler’s deeds and sought to protect Tommy. He is sick and needs medicine.” Ponk turned toward one of the Piglins that had emptied their inventory. “In my stuff, I have potions and snow. To help with the sickness.”

The leader turned to the same piglin, snorting as it searched their stuff. The piglin pulled out the potions, uncorking them and smelling them.

“Healing.” The piglin sniffed another. **“Regeneration.”**

With the potions confirmed, the Leader turned back to Ponk. “You not with Runt Defiler? You with Golden Runt?”

Ponk immediately nodded their head. “Yes. We are with Golden Runt. Runt Defiler hurt us and tried to take the Golden Runt. We came to get him back. To take him home. To help him.”

Around them, the piglins were all snorting amongst themselves, as if trying to discern if they were telling the truth. Ponk kept their chin up, meeting the eyes of the leader. After a good minute or two of deliberation, the leader held up one hand, the piglins falling silent.

“Masked one, you will go to Golden Runt. Only you.” The Leader pointed right at Sam, distrust clear in his gaze. “Green one stays here, away from Golden Runt.”

Ponk glanced over to Sam to check his opinion on the matter and saw him nodding. With that, Ponk snorted their agreement to the room at large and the leader made another gesture. With no other warning, the vines wrapped around their wrists tightened momentarily before dropping away altogether. Bringing their hands slowly around to the front, Ponk took a moment to rub the circulation back into their wrists. Carefully climbing to their feet, they looked at the leader to see if they gestured again.

Without further delay, the leader waved towards the piglin standing guarding the door. **“Take the masked one to Golden runt. If they are wanted, they can stay. If unwanted, kill them.”**

The piglin snorted their acknowledgement before turning and marching down the corridor, deeper towards the heart of the Bastion. Sparing one last look at Sam, Ponk rushed to catch up to their escort.

Ranboo didn’t remember falling asleep, but at some point he must have dozed off. He didn’t realise it until the sound of the doors being open snapped him awake. Quickly, he pulled Tommy closer to himself, instinctively protecting his friend even though the Piglins didn’t seem to be a threat.

It was only when he caught sight of a familiar mask that he uncurled from his defensive position.

“Ponk...” His voice cracked slightly, hope infusing itself in the name. “You came...”

His eyes glanced behind the masked man to try and find their companion, but saw only a piglin escort. The hope curdled in his chest, souring into dread and panic.

“W-where’s Sam?”

Ponk stepped forward, body relaxed and hand pointing in the direction the group had come from. “Colour confusion. The piglins didn’t appreciate the green nature of the Creeper hybrid so it was agreed that he would stay back. But more importantly, how are you and Tommy?”

Ranboo, having breathed a bit easier with the good news of the continued existence of Sam, felt all the stress that had been pushed to the side since being here rushing back. His face crumbled and he leaned forward, gripping onto Ponk as he tried to fight back the tears that threatened to fall. He couldn’t even speak, only hiccup and sob while clinging to the masked man like a lifeline.

A hand patted his back while he took some deep breaths in order to calm himself. He soaked up the affection, the first touch he’d received in a long time that didn’t feel demeaning or clinical. He didn’t realise how badly he needed it until he felt genuine comfort. He almost didn’t want to let go, but did as the masked doctor gently disentangled the two of them.

“What happened?” Ponk questioned, looking the Enderman up and down, their eyes widening as they finally registered Ranboo’s attire. “Why are you dressed like that? And- And is that a collar?!”

“Tommy claimed me to save me from the Piglins.” Ranboo’s fingers danced across the collar. “Then the Piglins made sure the claim stuck. I couldn’t fight them. If I did... they’d take me away from Tommy...”

The mention of the teen’s name had the doctor’s gaze flicking over to the nest where Tommy was fitfully sleeping. Tension spiked in their shoulders as they stared worriedly at the sick teen. They didn’t like how pale Tommy was, or the shallowness of his breathing. The fact that he was sweating suggested that he was at least hydrated, but the heat of the nether was oppressive, even in this sealed, inner chamber.

The masked doctor tugged one glove off before pressing the back of their hand to Tommy’s forehead. An unhappy expression pinched their eyes and they dropped their hand down and pinched the skin on the back of the boy’s hand. Pulling their hand back, a raised line remained and the lines around their eyes deepened in response. Ranboo warbled his concern and Ponk glanced back towards him.

“He’s been here for far too long,” Ponk reported, quickly rising to his feet. “We need to get him back to the Overworld, now!”

Wasting no time, Ranboo carefully picked up Tommy, cradling him close to his chest. Ponk then undid the knot binding the enderman to the fence post, reluctantly taking the lead in hand.

“The second we’re out of the Nether, this comes off.” Ponk knew enough about Piglin claims to know the collar was likely cursed, but at the very least he could remove the lead and give the ender-teen some semblance of dignity.

“Ponk, I could literally care less about the damn leash. I would crawl on all fours while meowing like a cat if it meant that Tommy would get out of here faster.” Ranboo tightened his grip on the aforementioned teen. “Now let’s get him out of here.”

Sam was still kneeling in the throne room of the bastion, trying to keep himself small and non-threatening. As a Creeper hybrid, he had a great deal of practice, though these piglins seemed particularly hostile. Then again, they’d apparently run afoul with Dream and the mad Admin had left a less-than-favourable impression in his wake. It made Sam lament his coloration.

Would Tommy feel the same way?

Thinking back to their initial encounter in the barn, Tommy hadn’t reacted negatively to his presence. Still, the idea that he could bring any form of discomfort to the teen who had suffered enough already made him sick to his stomach. He’d have to take things slow, see how Tommy reacted once he was at least physically healthy.

There was the sound of doors opening and several piglins began snorting angrily. Sam turned his head, seeing Ponk walking back into the throne room. He had a lead in his hand, and on the other end of the lead was...

“Ranboo?” Sam let out.

“Later,” Ponk cut in, the look in his eyes displaying the direness of the situation.

Even from where he was kneeling, Sam could see just how sick Tommy had become. The Creeper hissed angrily, cursing both Punz and Dream for delaying the boy’s return to the Overworld. Those two better hope he never laid eyes on them again, or he would make them regret the day they were born.

“Golden Runt’s Ender listens to you,” the Leader noted. Ranboo was quick to look submissive and humble as he stood just a step behind Ponk. “You spoke truth.”

“Yes, I did,” Ponk declared, meeting the Leader’s eye without hesitation. “And I speak it again now. If you want the Golden Runt to live, release Sam immediately and allow us to return to the Overworld.”

Immediately, the piglins were all snorting and squealing like Ponk had just threatened to kill Tommy. The brute that was guarding Sam looked ready to execute him on the spot. However, the Leader held up a hand to silence them.

“Threat?” he questioned, meeting the masked doctor’s eyes.

“No. Tommy is sick. Very sick. He needs medicine. Overworld medicine. He needs water and softness and cool. The Nether cannot provide that. Your Bastion cannot provide that.”

The earlier indignation gave way to bitter resignation and acceptance. The Leader nodded, then snorted once at the Brute guarding Sam. The axe was lowered, severing the bindings keeping him tied up.

“Go,” the Leader declared. “Take care of Golden Runt.”

Immediately, Sam got up and rushed over to the three players, hissing sympathetically at the sight of Tommy’s ill visage.

“I know you don’t like people riding you,” Ponk began, “but-”

“Put him on my back.”

Sam lowered himself so Ranboo could put Tommy on his back. Just the heat radiating off his body made the Creeper’s heart sink. That wasn’t good at all. Ranboo climbed on not long after, holding the teen close to his chest as Ponk took up the rear.

“Hold on tight,” Sam warned, turning toward the main entrance. “I’m not stopping until we reach home.”

Hands tightened in his fur and Sam took off, running faster than he'd ever run before. He bolted out of the throne room, out of the Bastion, heading straight for the swirling portal that would take them out of this fiery hellscape.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is *Eve & Paradise Lost* by Bastille.

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

A new (ill) cub enters the den, animals are gossipy and judgy, and whoa, Quackity's a dick right now.

Chapter Notes

So here we go, another new chapter. Once again, shout-out to Author_of_Insanity101, my lovely co-author/beta. The entire second section is hers as are large portions of both the first and third sections.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Fran had been sitting in front of her Master's nether portal since they stepped through it, eagerly awaiting his return with the Lemon One and the Golden Pup. She wanted to come with them, eager to lend a paw in his rescue, but her Master had forbidden it. He cared for her too much to risk her life in the hellscape of the Nether. Still, she was in a state of anticipation, worried about what kind of state the Golden Pup would be in when he was finally brought home. The stress that had stained Ponk's scent, along with the rumours that had spread through the animals, made Fran nervous about the Pup's condition.

The light of the portal brightened and sparked, causing her ears to perk up and tail to start wagging. However, seeing her Master come charging out with three players on his haunches had her whining in concern. He never let anyone ride him, not even her.

The first scent that hit her nose was the smokey layer that covered everyone leaving the nether and the second was the pungent odour of illness, which caused her to whine quietly.

The Lemon One hopped down, offering a hand out to the split Enderling. The rumours on the wind spoke of the one who found the Golden Pup, another pup himself who stood up for the boy. This must be them, and from the collar on his neck, he belonged to the Golden Pup like she belonged to her owner.

Once the split Enderling was on the ground, the Lemon One turned to lift the Golden Pup off of her Master's back. Carefully settling the pup in their arms, they turned to carry the pup deeper into the building. They, trailed by her Master and the Enderling, quickly found a nearby room.

Her Master carefully pulled the Enderling to the side of the room as she jumped up onto the bed. The Lemon One gave her a side eye but seemed content by her curling up by the pup's feet, out of their way.

The Lemon One placed the back of their hand against the pup's forehead and their scent shifted, concern lessening a little but the bitter undertones of distress remained. They summoned a bucket of water and a small cloth, which they dunked into the bucket before wringing it out some and placing it on the pup's forehead.

The split Enderling was staring over towards the pair, anxiety lacing through his scent. Fran knew that was not good, though it did show the Enderling's loyalty. The pup had chosen a good one.

Fran's Master rested his hand on the Enderling's shoulder. Jumping slightly, the Enderling shifted a portion of his attention towards her Master.

"He's going to be okay, Ranboo," her Master insisted. "Ponk will make sure of that. Now let me take a look at you, make sure those Piglins didn't hurt you."

The Enderling just shook his head, curling up on the chair he had been placed on. "I think I was, but the piglins took care of me. I'm not hurt at all, but they sealed this gold on me. It won't come off... and I kinda don't want it to."

Her Master sighed. "How about this Ranboo, you pull on this shirt, drink some milk, and have a bite to eat and I'll stop pushing for now."

The Enderling nodded quietly. "Just let me stay with Tommy. I... I don't want to leave him alone."

After handing some cloth over to the Enderling, her Master turned to face the Lemon One. "How's Tommy doing, Ponk?"

"I'm cleaning him up as we speak and I've applied a cold compress. Once he's clean, I'll administer a fever medicine, along with something for his throat. From there, we keep him hydrated and humidify the air. Think you could rig something with some ice?"

"Are villagers the worst mob to mess with?"

At that, the Enderling snorted. "No. That would be piglins. Prime, you should have seen how they acted with Dream..."

Her ears perked at the name of the Green Monster. Anger poured off both her Master and the Lemon One, but neither moved to show it. "Oh?" The Lemon One sounded casual as they continued to wipe down the Pup.

"Yeah," the Enderling shifted upright slightly, scent lightening with mirth. "Piglins know how to be angry well. They pounced on him and just started beating the crap out of him. They didn't stop until he was this limp, bloody mess. They dragged him off to a different part of the Bastion from where they kept Tommy and I. We never saw him after that."

The Lemon One and Fran's Master exchanged looks, the latter taking out his communicator and scrolling through it. His brow furrowed a bit as he continued to scroll.

"I'm not seeing any death messages," he remarked. "Meaning that Dream's still alive."

"Meaning he's a prisoner of the piglins," the Lemon One mused, not sounding unhappy about the prospect.

Fran's heart soared with that news. The Nether Dwellers were the right sort of beings to hold someone as dangerous as the Green Monster. That also meant that the Green Monster would be in a set location, stuck where the Nether Dwellers put him. And best of all, that meant that the Green Monster was no longer a threat to the Golden Pup. She knew she had to let the rest of the animals know so they could take appropriate action. However, as far as she was concerned, her place was here with the Golden Pup.

A distant caw from beyond the large redstone door made Fran's ear perk. She lifted her head, seeing a couple of crows perched on the trees outside. In his haste to help the Golden pup, her Master had not closed the door. Giving the Players in the room a quick glance, she hopped down from her perch, trotting over to the tree.

Is that him?

The Golden Chick?

He doesn't look good

Is he safe?

Is he safe?

Is he safe?

Fran sneezed in affirmation at their questions. *"My Master and the Lemon One have the Golden Pup. He is safe. But more than that, they bring news of the Green Monster's capture by the Nether Pigs. Spread the word."*

The crows cawed in agreement, taking to the skies immediately. Once they were gone, Fran turned back towards the bed, hopping back onto her perch. Right now, that was where she belonged: with her Master's pack and their new pup.

Word spread across the entire server on the wings of the crows, each of them carrying the same message: Tommyinnit was safe. This news alone was joyous to the mobs who had witnessed the horrid treatment of the boy. The accompanying tale of Dream's capture at the hands of the Hub Bastion Piglins also filled the mobs with a sense of satisfaction.

Of all the hostile mobs that existed, piglins were by far one of the most vindictive creatures. If the vile admin who had brought such harm to their golden child was in their clutches, then he would surely receive the punishment he deserved.

That meant they could focus on the rest of the players.

With Dream on the loose, the animals had elected to focus on him, merely observing the rest of them to see what they would do. And, of course, their findings hadn't exactly been the best.

Not all of the Players were beyond hope. There was the Creeper hybrid and the Lemon doctor, who had dropped everything to help the Golden Child the second they learned the truth. The ghost of the brother had also been heartbroken, piecing his soul back together to try and help the boy.

Then, there were the penitent ones. The Rainbow sheep, the demon, the Blood God and the Crowfather fell into this category. These were the players who showed genuine remorse for their inaction, though had yet to properly act on their remorse. Or if they had acted, it was seen as too late.

The Rainbow sheep was given a bit of a pass, since she was also dealing with the revelation of her "duckling's" role in everything. No one could blame her for the grief she felt at the betrayal of one she had trusted, especially since she was one of the few who had tried to aid the Golden Child during his turmoil.

The blaze and the mushroom prince also fell under the penitent, offering their freedom to try and bring unity to the rest of the players. Their willingness to accept the faults in their actions and allegiances had earned them the respect of the mobs.

The rest of them, however... they were so lost in their desire for vengeance and rage that they neglected to even think about the Golden Pup. He was little more than a banner for them, one they had left behind in the Blood God's barn. None of them had even bothered to try and take him (not that Baba would have allowed it) or provide him aid.

Clearly, they needed to be taught a lesson as well.

With the Green Monster taken care of, the mobs no longer felt the need to let them slide. While they wouldn't suffer as badly as the monster had, the mobs would make their displeasure known. They would feel the wrath of the world, and would come to regret their inaction.

New L'Manberg's air felt oppressive, more so than it usually did. Even outside of the town proper, a grim aura hung about the place, not helped by the increase in mob violence in the past few days. They'd had to step up patrols around the city because of the increase of attacks.

No longer were the mobs content with the occasional victories they'd had before. Now, they were dealing with coordinated assaults from pillagers, skeletons with *far* better aim, and witches with a wider variety of potions and spells. No one had lost a canon life yet, but everyone was on edge, and it was beginning to strain the already frayed nerves of everyone.

Because of the increase in attacks, Tubbo had issued a regrouping command, having everyone fall back to New L'Manberg. Even with their improved strategic prowess, the mobs

at least stayed out of their well-lit water town, meaning it was a safe haven to rethink their strategies for locating Dream.

Unfortunately, the chances of that were slim to none.

It seemed like every time the server members met up, arguments and squabbles overtook any rational conversation. The catalyst for this animosity was none other than Quackity, who, currently, was absolutely going off on Jack Manifold. The reason: the missing “God Collar.”

The young president felt his eye twitch, his ears ringing from the screams and shouts that filled the senate chambers. This was the eighth person (that he knew of) that the duck hybrid had accused of stealing the damn thing, usually for baseless and stupid reasons. It didn’t help that Jack Manifold was just as trigger-happy and volatile as the duck hybrid and quickly matched his energy.

Watching the meeting devolve once again into chaos and hatred, Tubbo felt like he wanted to cry. He shoved the tears back, like he always did, trying to put on a brave face. He was the fucking President and he could *not* show any weakness.

(It was times like this that he cursed the fact that he was not of drinking age. No wonder Schlatt had been such a drunk if *this* is what he had to deal with.)

Puffy sidled up on his good side, concern lining her brow. She placed a gentle hand on his arm, rubbing it softly with her thumb.

“Tubbo, are you doing okay?” she asked softly, something that made his already fragile hold on his emotions crack. Still, he kept it in. “You don’t look good. When was the last time you slept?”

“What is ‘slept’?” he quipped dryly, knowing that he hadn’t had a proper night’s rest since the day Wilbur blew up the country. The bags under his eyes were the same colour as his suit.

“Tubbo...”

“Someone has to keep these assholes in line, and if I don’t do it, no one will.”

Puffy’s silence showed that she couldn’t argue with his declaration. And wasn’t *that* a sorry state of affairs. The fucking 17-year-old was the most mature person on this entire fucking server. Prime, he hated this place.

Something smashed and Tubbo looked up, seeing Quackity had his axe embedded in the table. Jack Manifold was on the ground, his netherite armour manifesting on his body while a sword appeared in his hand. Niki and Fundy were both trying to help the latter while Karl, HBomb, and BadBoyHalo tried to hold back the former.

“Let go of me!” Quackity shrieked. “I know he took it! He’s always whispering behind our backs! He’s in league with Dream!!”

“Like hell I am!” Jack shouted back, pointing his sword at the duck. “I’m a L’Manberg founder for fuck sake!! Why the fuck would I be on that fucking telletubby’s side?!”

“Then who the fuck do you keep whispering to in those damn headphones?!”

Jack put a hand to his headpiece. “I’m listening in. Sometimes I’ll pick up conversations or snippets of information. I was hoping they would have something about Dream, but they’ve been unusually quiet about him.”

“Now isn’t *that* convenient?” Quackity’s voice was dripping with malice and sarcasm.

“Convenient? *Convenient*? Nothing about this is convenient! It’s not always nice to always hear random whispers no one else can, but sure, it’s convenient!” Jack threw his hands up and rolled his eyes so hard that Tubbo almost felt it himself.

Quackity snarled and Tubbo found himself standing, almost instinctively. “I’m talking about how your voices seem to have no information on Dream when we’re trying to hunt for him! What else are you hiding, huh?! Maybe Dream got in that glitchy head of yours and turned you into his drone! Maybe you stole the God Collar for your precious Ma-”

Tubbo slapped his palm down on the table in front of him, the noise so loud and sudden, it made everyone freeze. “What about this argument helps any of us? Fuck the God Collar for now, it does us no good if we can’t keep it together long enough to come up with a plan to find Dream. Both of you are adults, so grow the fuck up. Now, disarm, shut up, and sit down until you can contribute anything of use and stop wasting all of our time.”

Jack Manifold at least had the decency to look sheepish. He mumbled a “Sorry, Tubbo,” under his breath and returned to his seat. Quackity, on the other hand, just started laughing. It was an ugly, spiteful laugh that reminded Tubbo way too much of Schlatt and Dream.

“Well, well, look who’s putting on the big boy pants,” the duck jeered. “You’re acting as if you have any power here.”

“I’m the fucking President-”

“You’re not shit!” Now it was Quackity’s turn to slam his hand on the table. “You’re just a little boy pretending to be a man! Your ‘Presidency’ is what led to Tommy getting exiled in the first place!! We had a plan, Tubbo! Back then, when Dream dropped that ultimatum, we had a plan to keep Tommy safe! But you-!” he jabbed a finger straight in Tubbo’s face. “You agreed with that fucker!”

“Quackity!” Puffy exclaimed, standing up. “That eno-”

“Stay out of this, Puffy!” Quackity’s gaze remained locked on Tubbo, who was stumbling back in shock. Sensing weakness, Quackity pounced. “He knows what he did. He’s the one who let Dream take Tommy. He’s the one who exiled his so-called ‘best friend’. Everything that happened to Tommy, all the pain and suffering he endured at Dream’s hands... it’s all. His. *Fault*...”

Those words were the last straw for Tubbo’s composure as the tears finally made an appearance. He turned blindly and started to sprint for the exit. He ran out of the meeting

room, out of the building, out of L'Manberg. Wooden boardwalks gave way to dirt paths until he was deep in the woods, far from any player-made builds.

The suit he was wearing, his presidential uniform, suddenly felt claustrophobic and he needed it off. One hand reached up and ripped the tie from around his neck while the other started to scrabble at the buttons. Tossing the tie to the side, he continued to sprint away from the meeting and Quackity's accusing eyes. His tears continued to fall and his shirt dampened as he finally pulled the suit jacket off of his shoulder.

Suddenly, his foot caught on a tree root and he fell, landing flat on his face. The shock of the fall left him stunned, then he just started crying all over again. Rain began to fall, the cold water mixing with his tears as he curled up in the mud, his mind a mess of pain and turmoil.

He was so lost in his own head that he didn't hear footsteps approaching, not until a pair of black boots and a long purple robe entered his field of vision. He looked up, seeing that it was a witch staring down at him. They stared at one another, neither of them moving.

For a brief moment, Tubbo contemplated moving. However, the crushing weight of his guilt and sorrow made him lower his head, his eyes falling closed. A glass bottle shattered on his head as a potion washed over him. His strength gave out and everything went black...

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is guts by margø.

Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Another strategy meeting (but this time the participants don't hate each other), planning what to do with a child surprise, and effing with the circle of life

Chapter Notes

So here we go, another new chapter. Once again, shout-out to Author_of_Insanity101, my lovely co-author/beta. She wrote the majority of the chapter, even most of section one before I managed to post the last chapter, with some additions from me in the second and third sections.

My cat also says hi as he's sitting on my lap while I post this.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was common knowledge among Players that Testificates were basically a watered down, more primitive form of human. Left to their own devices, Testificates would split into two set factions depending on their temperament.

The peaceful option of these sets were the common Villager. Many could take on various jobs, open trade with Players, and even offer resources in exchange for emeralds. However, this peaceful existence meant that they were weak and fragile, unable to defend themselves.

Then, there was the other option. The barbaric and hostile Pillagers. These Testificates would attack players on sight and were much smarter and braver than their weak-willed counterparts. They would master the dark arts of magic to summon vicious Vexes and massive Ravagers. Their raids were dreaded and their patrols were never to be underestimated.

On the Dream SMP, in the wake of the war declared against the former admin, the various Pillager outposts had banded together, coming together to form a veritable army of their own kind. They put out a call to arms, summoning even the Witches and Illusionists to their ranks. By the day, their numbers swelled until they numbered in the hundreds.

Of course, for such numbers to exist, they would need a base to accommodate them all. Thus, taking a page out of the player's handbook, the hostile Testificates laid siege to a Savannah biome, creating a Mega Illager Outpost.

Rough wooden walls surrounded the entire biome, erected from logs of acacia wood. A massive gate stood at the only entrance, Evokers posted in the watchtowers as Vindicators patrolled the walls in constant shifts.

Inside, an array of tents were erected in uneven lines, small wooden huts dotting the landscape as well. Massive stables lined the western wall, housing at least two dozen Ravagers. A sprawling training ground was set up nearby, where Pillagers and Vindicators could be seen training with their axes and crossbows. The cages that occasionally could be seen in the outposts across the server had been switched out, replaced with deep, stone pits covered by an iron grate.

At the centre of the enormous camp was the main tower, but it was far from your average pillager outpost. The tower was easily twice as large as a normal one, giving them a clear view of the entire biome and beyond. There was an enchanting set up for their magically-inclined numbers, and enough food preserves to last them for months. Already, there were plans for hunting expeditions and food raids on the Player Areas.

At the very top of the outpost tower, the leaders of the various factions gathered around a massive war room table, overlooking a map of the entire SMP proper. Various figurines, crudely carved from wood, dotted the map, letting them plan their assault.

"I received word from one of my sisters," the Witch Coven leader declared. "The Players have congregated in the water town called New L'Manberg."

"Using the water to protect them from the hostile mobs." Johnny, the leader of the Vindicators, couldn't help but nod. "Clever. I'm assuming the waters are lit to prevent the Drowned from entering?"

The Coven leader nodded, which was when the Evoker leader chimed in. *"The mobs have chosen to grant them the sanctuary of their water town, as well as access to their various builds in what is known as the Greater SMP area. However, the woods and wilderness beyond are ours to command."*

"What of this area?" the Illusionist Commander questioned, gesturing to a large portion of the map marked as the Badlands.

"The violent players are to be kept away from there," Johnny answered, his tone serious. "The Creeper Hybrid's home is to be protected at all costs. That's where the Golden-Haired Boy is being kept."

"We have already posted our banner on the edge of the territory," the Pillager leader spoke up. "It will ensure that everyone knows the land is protected."

"Excellent," Johnny said with a nod of approval. "Continue patrols and observations. I want a full Player list and profiles related to the Golden-Haired boy. We need to know who deserves our wrath and who deserves to be spared."

Just then, there was the sound of hurried footsteps. All eyes turned toward the staircase leading to the lower levels, where a panting pillager could be seen running up to them. Upon

reaching the top of the stairs, the pillager took a moment to catch their breath before addressing the leaders.

“One of the patrol parties just returned,” he reported. “They have a prisoner. The goat child with the burn scars.”

The entire table exchanged surprised looks at the news, then hurried to investigate.

The Witch that had struck Tubbo with a potion observed her prisoner with a mix of concern. The boy was draped over the back of a ravager, hands trapped in a pair of wooden cuffs. His clothes were torn and muddy from his earlier breakdown and he looked malnourished and sickly. There was also the matter of how her potion should have worn off hours ago, and yet he was still asleep.

When she had first spotted him in the woods while patrolling with her group, she had intended to strike him down like any other Player. However, when she'd seen the anguish and resignation in his face when their eyes met, she'd hesitated. It didn't help that he was the same age as the Golden Child, and what he carried around his neck.

A compass, enchanted to tie not to a lodestone, but to a person. The markings on the back had the words “Your Tommy” carved into it, which further cemented the Witch's desire to spare the boy. Clearly, he belonged to the Golden Child as much as the Split Ender did. And thus, she had chosen to capture rather than kill.

As she pulled the sleeping boy off of the Ravager's back, the leaders of the outpost came out to greet their platoon. She held the boy in her arms like one would a baby, giving a bow of respect to the Coven Leader and the rest. All of them were staring at the child, their expressions a mixture of confusion and concern.

“I'm not an expert of Player health but nothing about the goat child screams health.” Johnny tilted his head, reaching out to poke at the scarred cheek.

“They were tearing at their clothing when I found them,” the witch explained, holding out the boy to show the tattered shirt. *“And when our eyes met, he looked defeated. He did not even try to run.”*

The Illusionist leader looked taken aback by that. *“He didn't run? Did he have a shield? Did he fight back at all?”*

The witch just shook her head. *“He knew I was there and he did not act to defend himself, just accepted his fate.”*

The Evoker leader hummed. *“Odd, Players are tenacious beings and rarely accept their defeat. Maybe he's sick?”*

“Even if he is, we cannot forget who he is,” the Coven leader spoke up, her face grim. *“This is the player who gave the Golden Child to the Green Monster. He is the one who left the*

child to suffer.”

A tense silence fell over everyone, that information sinking in. The goat boy had indeed been the one who gave the Golden child to the Green monster, which was something that could not be easily overlooked. However, they also could not overlook the fact that he himself is a child. And given the state he was in, none of them could bring themselves to truly hate the boy.

“Perhaps...” an Evoker from the patrol piped up, *“he just needs to be taught better. If all the Player adults are so deficient, what else was he to know? It is only natural that he erred with the examples he was presented with. And so it’s our job to correct his failings and put him on the correct path.”*

At this suggestion, Johnny smiled, nodding his head. *“An excellent idea. We will train the goat boy so he will be better.”*

“And once he is better, we can return him to the Golden Child.” The Witch who’d found the boy, held up the compass the boy had been wearing. *“I think he belonged to him once, so he should be returned once he has been fixed.”*

There were nods of agreement all around. It would take some time to properly train the boy, not to mention nurse him back to health, but if he truly belonged to the Golden Child, then it would be worth it. Returning the goat to the Golden Child would be the ultimate tribute.

All they needed was a little time.

There was a heavy pounding on the door of Techno’s cabin. From his bedroom, Techno rolled over in his bed, trying to return to his hibernation. After what happened with Tommy and being kicked out of his own barn, the piglin had decided to take that as a sign to hibernate and wait for things to cool down.

Of course, the world wasn’t about to let him.

The heavy pounding continued and Techno reluctantly got up, grabbing the Axe of Peace from where it was resting in the corner. He shuffled to one of his frost-covered windows, cautiously peering out. What he saw made him drop the axe in shock and he was quick to open the door.

“Heh, Phil?” he let out, blinking in surprise. “What are you doing here? And... why is Ghostbur with you?”

The ghost of Wilbur Soot was bobbing lightly behind Phil, clutching a strange book to his chest. There was a clarity to his gaze that hadn’t been there even when the man was alive. That, and the ominous aura of the book, left Technoblade feeling a bit uneasy.

“Hey, Techno,” Phil greeted, looking and sounding tired. “We need your help.”

Ghostbur rested his free hand on top of Friend's blue coat, sighing deeply. The prospect of coming back to life, going back to being Wilbur, was nerve-wracking. Still, he knew that it was the only choice he had. The floatiness that came with being Ghostbur was hurting the people around him, and it kept him from being able to focus. Holding the Revive Book had restored his sanity, but there was no telling how long it would last.

He needed to be alive again. He had to make things right.

"Wilbur," Phil called out, drawing the ghost from his thoughts. "Is the circle accurate?"

Ghostbur blinked, turning to look at where his father was. He and Techno had cleared out the basement of the latter's cabin, using the open floor to prepare for the resurrection ritual. Redstone dust was laid out in a circle, various runes in Ancient Galactic drawn in blood along the edges. The instructions for the circle were in the book, which Ghostbur couldn't let go of just yet. Not when his sanity hinged on it being in his hands.

Glancing towards the ground, he compared the ritual circle in front of him to the one depicted in the book. He narrowed his eyes, staring intently at the runic arraignment. Nodding slowly, he looked back up at Phil. "It's correct."

Phil's expression brightened a degree, though he still looked rather solemn. No doubt Kristen wouldn't be pleased with them messing with the natural order. Maybe if they burned the book when this was done, they could appease her. Wilbur really didn't want to make his mom mad. However, being the son of the Goddess of Death should have some perks.

Technoblade huffed as he finished lighting several blood red candles around the circle, providing the room with an eerie illumination. "Man, necromancy is really going to drive down the property value around these parts."

"Well, we can help you spruce the place back up when this is over," Phil spoke up, straightening his back and fluffing his wings. "L'Manberg has gone downhill hard and I have no intention of sticking around any longer."

"I'm pretty sure if anyone saw me there, they'd have my head on a spit," Ghostbur chimed in with a bitter chuckle. "Not that I blame them. I was an asshole. Especially to Tommy..."

Phil opened his mouth, likely in a parental attempt to deny such a thing and Techno elbowed him while nodding. Friend baa-ed at him, pressing her head against his side.

"You were, but you also recognize your failings," she said in a kind tone. *"You will do right by the golden lamb in this new life."*

Ghostbur smiled down at her. "I hope you're right, Friend..."

"Wilbur," Phil called out again. "It's time."

Despite not needing to, Ghostbur took a deep breath, floating over to the circle. Upon reaching it, he felt like a door was closing behind him. He couldn't back out now. He handed

the book to Phil, then moved to the very centre. He laid down on the ground, crossing his arms over his chest as if he were a true corpse.

“Ready,” he exhaled as steadily as he could.

Techno took a step back as Phil opened the book, beginning the incantation. The redstone dust began to glow, the candle-lights flickered, and outside, the clouds began to coil and darken ominously. Ghostbur felt a tugging sensation deep in his core and it made him cringe, terror washing over him.

This felt wrong. He shouldn't be doing this! He was scared!

However, there was nothing to be done. Phil shouted the last line of the incantation, slicing the palm of his hand before slamming it down on the glowing circle. Everything ignited into a blinding flash of light, the sound of a train horn filling Ghostbur's ears as the world faded into the light.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is Freddy by CG5 & Black Gryph0n ft. MatPat

Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

Rebirth, hey Tommy's awake, and guilt and ascension

Chapter Notes

Chapter 27 is here and with this, have the knowledge that the Google Doc is over 150 pages. Once again, shout-out to Author_of_Insanity101, my lovely co-author/beta. She wrote a vast chunk of this chapter, namely all of Wilbur's bit, much of Tommy's and a large portion of Sapnap and George.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur inhaled loudly, gasping for air with lungs that had not breathed in months. Everything hurt, his body so stiff that it was a chore to even move a finger. He coughed and wheezed, the air around him musty and stale, filled with the stench of rot.

As he mustered the strength to open his eyes, he was met with the sight of a roughly carved cave, one with manic writing scrawled into the stone. A rotten, wooden chair was off to the side, covered in cobwebs and a thick layer of dust and dirt. Faded glowstone poked through the stone, illuminating the space weakly. As his vision cleared and he was able to read the carved words, dread lurched in his stomach.

This was the button room. The place where he'd blown up L'Manberg. The place where he'd begged his own father to kill him. The place where his body had been left to rot in the wake of his crimes.

In a moment of pure panic, Wilbur forced his body to move. Every joint popped and cracked painfully as he managed to sit up, scrambling to find a way out. The hole that had been blown into the wall was completely covered, filled in with a thick layer of cobblestone to seal it. The entrance he had carved when he made this room was also sealed, blackstone bricks preventing anyone from entering.

Or from leaving.

Desperate for anything that might help him, he checked his inventory. By some miracle, all the stuff he'd had when he had died was still there. Perma-deaths must work differently from other deaths, Canon or otherwise. Either that or his mother had decided to give him some grace. Though from the looks of his inventory contents, the latter seemed less likely.

He had several rotten jacket potatoes, some mouldy steaks, discoloured potions that likely were of no use anymore. Just as his desperation hit its peak, he found his old tools. A chipped iron axe, a diamond shovel covered in mud, and his saviour: a diamond pickaxe. The durability was low and it likely wouldn't last long, but at the very least, it would get him out.

Wilbur's memories of Ghostbur were spotty at best, most of his clarity surrounding Tommy and the events after finding him in the barn. However, he did have a vague memory of a creeper blowing a hole in the side of the cliff, revealing his tomb. His flighty, ghostly self had fled the scene because he didn't want to deal with the seriousness of everything, but he could remember how it had been sealed again, a simple layer of cobblestone covering this blight on L'Manberg's history.

And now, Wilbur was mining through that layer, knowing it was his best chance. His muscles hurt to move, especially heaving a pickaxe, but he forced himself to do it. Little by little, he chipped away at the cobblestone until finally, light broke through.

That small pinprick of light reinvigorated Wilbur, his limbs moving a bit easier with every swing. He swung and he swung, expanding on the whole until he could see the wooden docks of New L'Manberg. Even when the pickaxe finally broke in his hands, Wilbur clawed and punched at the stone, uncaring of the damage done to his hands.

When the cobblestone finally gave way, Wilbur stumbled through the hole in his dusty tomb. His foot hit nothing but air and he plummeted, landing in the waters of L'Manberg lake. The shock of the winter water made his muscles seize once more as he screamed into the icy depths. He tried to move, tried to swim, tried to get out, but nothing worked--!

Something closed on the collar of his coat and he was dragged out of the water. Wilbur gasped and coughed, spitting out the water he'd swallowed as he was deposited onto the wooden platforms. As he shoved his sopping wet hair out of his face, he heard a gasp.

"Wilbur?"

Dread lanced through his chest. Slowly, he looked up, coming face to face with the rainbow wool of Captain Puffy. She had come to the Dream SMP after his death, so he'd only met her as Ghostbur. What few memories he had of her from that time were always warm, so maybe he had a chance. Maybe...

"You're alive..." Puffy whispered, looking him over in shock. "How are you alive? How are you..."

"P-Puffy..." Wilbur coughed, his voice so rough and gravelly that he barely recognized it. Prime, it hurts just to get the word out. "I... have t-to..."

He broke out into a coughing fit, doubling over as a gentle hand rested on his back to steady him. Something was pressed into his hand and he realised it was a potion. Healing, to be specific. Without hesitation, he ripped the cork out and downed the contents.

Warmth spread through his body, his muscles untensing just a bit and the pain in his throat subsiding. It wasn't completely gone, but he felt less like a living corpse and more like a

living person. After taking a few deep breaths, he lifted his head, meeting Puffy's eye once more.

"I have to go..." He sounded more like himself this time, even if he was still a bit rough. "I... have to go to Tommy..."

"Tommy..." A wave of sadness seemed to wash over the sheep hybrid, her eyes full of betrayal and regret. "You came back... for Tommy."

"Yes..." Wilbur nodded. "I can't... fail him again..."

Hearing this, Puffy's sadness gave way for determination. She stood up, hauling Wilbur to his feet as she did. He needed a moment to steady himself, but he managed to get his legs under him. As he did that, Puffy summoned a few things from her inventory: another potion, some carrots, a golden apple, and a sword.

"Here," she insisted, handing him all the stuff. "Get out of L'Manberg while you can. There are Pillagers and mobs everywhere, so be on your guard. And whatever you do, stay away from the other Players, especially Quackity."

Wilbur nodded, clumsily shoving all the stuff into his inventory before stumbling across the boardwalk. With each step, he gained more confidence until he was properly running. He didn't look back, even as the wooden planks made way for dirt paths and dense trees.

(He didn't notice how the mobs parted ranks for him, letting him pass through unharmed. If the Rainbow Sheep trusted him, then so would they.)

Tommy's entire body felt heavy. Even his eyelids felt like they were being held closed with cement. How long had he been asleep? When had he even fallen asleep?

Slowly, his mind began to churn, attempting to remember what had happened. He had been in the weird, animal filled place. With Bob the Cow, Baba the polar bear, and all of those dogs. And... and Ranboo.

Remembering Ranboo, Tommy's mind flashed from the Ender hybrid smiling to an image of him screaming. Screaming while being pinned down by... by piglins.

Piglins... The Nether... Dream!

Tommy sat up with a gasp, eyes taking in a new, unrecognised space. Everything was made of stone, from the walls to the floor. A bright red carpet was laid out across the room and there were some chests pushed up against the wall near a simple oak door. A jukebox in the corner was playing some random disc, and something black and white came rushing over from a chair nearby.

"Tommy!" Ranboo's voice called out, mixing with an Enderman's cry. "You're finally awake!"

Tommy reached up, feeling at the blurry black and white thing that was slowly coming into focus. Large, long hands curled around his, squeezing it in a way that was both tight and gentle. Kindness was baked into every line of the enderman hybrid and it was a comfort to see Ranboo looking so relaxed and well after his last memories.

He was dressed differently, the stiff suit replaced with a loose, cream-coloured shirt with billowy sleeves that reached his elbows. Dark brown slacks came to his knees, also loose like the shirt. His crown was gone, but he was wearing weird golden bands around his wrists and ankles, and a golden choker around his neck. In the back of his mind, Tommy couldn't help but think that they looked pretty on the Ender.

"Where-" Tommy began to rasp before breaking off immediately to cough. A bottle was quickly pressed into his hands and Tommy downed it immediately. It was cool, refreshing water and it felt like a balm to his throat. "Where are we...?"

Ranboo took the empty bottle back, smiling back at Tommy. "We're at Sam's place. Sam and Ponk came back to get us from the Bastion after *He* attacked us."

Hearing this, Tommy began to recall what had happened in the Nether. He remembered the explosion, falling, then-

"The Lava..." Horror washed over him, remembering how both Sam and Ponk had fallen head first into the lava. Because of the trap Dream had set. The trap he set for Tommy. The trap Sam and Ponk had stumbled into... because of him.

They had died because of him...

They had lost *Canon lives* because of him...

Why would they have come back for him after all the trouble he had caused them? Did they want to punish him for the trouble he'd caused? What would he have to do to repay them? Would they want to take his remaining life? Or would they want him to work to pay it off? He was scared. He didn't know what to expect. He-

A pulse of light by the end of his bed caught both his and Ranboo's attention. A masked figure in green solidified into being, floating somewhat off the floor.

"Hello, Tommy."

Terror lanced through Tommy as he stared at the not-quite-right Dream. Before he could even think of stopping himself, he screamed. The mask tilted in a display of confusion and concern, but Tommy was too scared to think straight. He scrambled as far against the headboard of the bed as he could, eyes never leaving that floating, ominous Dream-like creature.

The door to the room flew open and in came Sam and Ponk. Through his terror, Tommy felt a pang of guilt at the fresh burns decorating their skins. If he survived this encounter with the Dream-thing, he would have to make it up to them. That is, if they didn't give him to the Dream-thing.

“Dream?” Sam let out.

“What the fuck?!” Ponk exclaimed, brandishing a pair of netherite hoes angrily.

“Ah,” the creature breathed, “the form.”

And before Tommy’s eyes, the floating figure shifted, shrinking from the towering frame to about the same size as the boy. The bright green robes shimmered in the light, turning from the bright neon green to a deep, midnight blue. The hood of the robes fell away, revealing a mess of curly hair that turned a similar chestnut colour to Tubbo’s. Finally, the figure removed the large mask, revealing a young face with stars for freckles and bright eyes that swirled with every colour of the rainbow at once.

The terror Tommy was feeling lifted but some level of fear remained. “Who are you?” he demanded.

“I am the one known as XD. Protector and God of this server. I speak for the world, and as its voice...” The creature gave an elegant bow, one that felt far too low for one calling itself a God. “I have come to offer my sincerest regrets for all you have been made to endure at the hands of my vile former-Admin.”

This had everyone stunned, the adults lowering their weapons in visible confusion. Ranboo, who had gone from next to the bed to putting himself between XD and Tommy, seemed confused on what to do.

“You’re... apologising?” There was something in Ranboo’s tone that sounded almost dangerous. “You think that means anything? Where were you when your Admin was torturing him?! Or when he was left to rot on that Prime-forsaken island?! Where were you when he was sick and dying in that fucking Bastion?! If you feel so bad, then why didn’t you fucking DO SOMETHING?!”

The silence that followed was deafening. Tommy clung to the sleeve of Ranboo’s shirt, his breath coming out in ragged gasps as he waited for the inevitable. No one liked yelling or disrespect, so there was no chance Ranboo would be getting away without some sort of punishment. (images of holes and TNT filled his mind, making him want to vomit.)

The figure stared silently at Ranboo for a moment, their expression unreadable. Then, they reached out with a clawed, starry hand. Tommy closed his eyes, bracing to hear screaming or claws through flesh.

However, all he heard was the sound of fingers through hair and a confused churr from Ranboo. Cracking an eye open, he was shocked to see the creature *petting* Ranboo’s head.

“I can see why the child claimed you as his own. It is a rare being that would fight with one it knows outmatches it for the sake of another.”

Something deep in Tommy’s gut did not like the creature touching Ranboo. He tugged on the Enderman’s sleeve, pulling him closer. XD seemed to chuckle, calmly removing their hand, turning to face Tommy again.

“To answer the Enderman’s question, I fear that even as the protector of this server, my influence is somewhat limited. Normally, I cannot directly interfere in the affairs of players outside of assigning Admins and ensuring the laws of the land are followed.”

“Then, what changed?” Sam questioned, he and Ponk moving closer to the bed Tommy was laying in. “Why are you interfering now?”

XD turned to Sam with a soft smile, rainbow eyes shimmering in the light of the lanterns.

“Because the world deemed it necessary. The Split Ender made the world aware of the wrongs brought down unfairly on a youngling and cried for justice. For my part, I have pulled the strings to aid in their endeavours.”

“The piglins that found Tommy...” Ponk let out, eyes wide.

“Indeed. Someone to protect him until the designated guardians came for him.”

“Us...” Sam realised, covering his mouth. “You mean us... don’t you?”

“The only adults to drop everything for the child, to risk their own lives without hesitation to see him brought to safety. I can think of none more worthy of the titles.”

Hearing all of this, Tommy’s eyes flickered to Sam and Ponk. His heart ached as he realised just how much they had done for him, and yet he had gotten them killed. He would have to work extra hard to pay them back, to prove that he was worth the effort they put in.

“However, I cannot refute the words of the Split Ender. Perhaps if I had been more attentive, I could have done something to ensure that things would not have fallen to such a point. As such, please allow me to bestow a small gift upon you, Tommyinnit, as a token of our sincere regrets.”

Before Tommy could say anything or attempt to deny the gift (He didn’t feel he deserved such a thing), XD reached out with a single starry finger, tapping it against the center of his forehead.

“May you now hear the words of the world that loves you so.”

There was a small push against his mind and Tommy leaned back a bit, feeling like something was being unlocked and opened. He blinked, shaking his head a bit. Before he could even comment on the odd sensation, the figure turned back to Ranboo.

“And for your willingness to challenge me for the others around you, you shall also be rewarded.” XD reached forward, this time tapping their finger against Ranboo’s forehead. “May you no longer fear the summer rain, and seek comfort in water’s embrace.”

Ranboo shivered and looked rather startled, rubbing his forehead while attempting to decipher XD’s words. As he did, the God drew back and looked rather pleased with themselves.

“May our next meeting be one of glad tidings.” And with that, the creature slipped their mask back on their face, pulling their cloak around them and vanishing into nothing.

George and Sapnap had settled in quite well in their shared hobbit hole. The supplies gifted to them and the animals provided allowed them to create a functioning base that could sustain them. They had a small pen for their animals, a quaint farm for their crops, and they were even able to begin some repairs and expansions to the hobbit hole.

At the moment, Sapnap was on the roof of the hobbit hole, patching a hole in the ceiling before spreading out the dirt. He stopped for a moment, wiping his brow before sliding down the hill to their well. He drew out some water, drinking his fill before turning to George.

“How’s the harvest coming?” he called out.

“The beetroots and potatoes have come in nicely,” George reported, straightening up from where he had been bent over the fields. “What do you say to some beetroot soup and jacket potatoes for dinner?”

“Sounds perfect.”

Their little cottage core domicile had allowed them the chance to properly relax for the first time in what felt like months. In truth, they had almost forgotten that they were technically prisoners. Of course, they were reminded every time they saw their reflection, like now as Sapnap lowered his water bucket.

Seeing the glint of the collar on his neck, the blaze hybrid couldn’t help but sigh. He lowered the bucket, setting it aside.

“How do you think Tommy’s doing?” he asked, his gaze wandering to the sky and the clouds passing overhead.

From the fields, George paused his harvesting. Even from where he was standing, Sapnap could see the various emotions flicking across the man’s face.

“I hope he’s doing better but honestly, I am worried about the condition Dream left him in. Not to mention how we all let it happen. Frankly, I wouldn’t be surprised if his mental state is worse than his physical condition. Tommy’s always thrived on social connections and isolated and abused? He would not be doing well.”

Sapnap nodded at that, unable to refute those words. Silently, he reached for his communicator, opening the chat to see the image Ranboo had posted. The one of the smile carved in the back of Tommy’s neck. He hissed, reminded of his disgust at his former best friend and of his own guilt at the situation.

“Sapnap,” George said from the field, sounding a bit worried. “Put the communicator down. You’re only torturing yourself and it helps no one.”

“Yeah, well maybe I deserve it for torturing Tommy.” Sapnap lowered the communicator, his eyes glistening with unshed tears. “Maybe I deserve to suffer for the role I played in Dream’s sick game. Maybe... I deserve to be in a real prison, and not in this cushy house arrest bullshit.”

George walked over, one hand reaching out to pluck the comm from Sapnap’s grasp, the other wrapping around his friend’s arm. “Well, most everyone else played the same role, either through willful ignorance or just plain negligence. Myself included.”

“But I was *there*, George.” The Blaze’s voice cracked. “I saw him in the nether that day. I saw the heartbreak and pain... how skinny and dirty he was... and I played along with Dream’s sick joke. And I... I enjoyed it...”

“The difference between you and Dream is that while you both laughed at Tommy, he arranged everything and you feel remorse.” George’s voice was strong as he leaned into Sapnap’s side. “You may have failed, but you failed by trusting our friend, one you had no reason to be suspicious of.”

Sapnap sagged back into George, sadness etched into his brow. “I don’t think I can believe you, at least not now.”

“That will have to do, at least at the moment.”

Sapnap only had a second to sit with George’s words before a glow caught his attention and he stiffened as a figure began to form.

“XD.” George named the figure first as details began to solidify. “You look different.”

“Indeed,” the figure replied, wrapping their midnight blue cloak around them as their mask pulsed with a serene cyan colour in the letters. “I was harshly reminded of my likeness to my former Admin and felt it was time for a change. And in that vein of metamorphosis, I have chosen to elect someone far more suited for the role.”

George straightened and pushed his glasses to the top of his head. “Who is it?”

XD pushed their mask to the side of their face, their rainbow eyes settling on George. “I can think of none more worthy than you, George Lore.”

At that, both George and Sapnap did a double take, exchanging glances that were mixed with confusion, guilt, and more than a little disbelief.

“Me?” George asked, sounding so small and unsure. “Why me?”

“Someone needs to step in as the server admin, seeing as Dream has proven himself unworthy of the responsibility. I cannot hold the position for long, as it’s not meant to be held by me.”

“Again, why me? I fell for Dream’s nonsense and failed Tommy.” The pain in George’s voice betrayed just how guilty he felt for the role he played in this sadistic drama, his grip on

Sapnap's arm tightening to an almost painful degree. "How am I a good choice for the responsibility of being admin?"

XD sighed, sitting down on the very air around them and leaning forward. It almost reminded Sapnap of a teacher about to deliver a harsh grade.

"If I am honest, there is a rather stark lack of viable options for a suitable candidate. Most of the worthy candidates are younglings, and I refuse to force this responsibility on one of them. The adults remaining..." The God grimaced. "To say they have proved themselves unfit with their actions in the recent weeks would be an understatement. The few who have shown forethought and dedication have other duties that they must attend to, leaving me with the penultimate choice between you two."

Sapnap felt a sense of shock that he was up for the role and a greater sense of relief that he was being passed over for admin. He knew that he felt too much guilt over the whole thing with Dream and Tommy, as well as his own personal failures, to really become a good admin. George was a far better fit for the role. Depressed like he was, but far more stable than the blaze could hope to be.

"Pandas?" George let out, turning to face Sapnap. "What do you think? Should I?"

In response, Sapnap lightly pushed George forward. "I say go for it, Gogy. When God says you're fit, I'd say you're fit."

George sighed deeply, but nodded in acknowledgement. XD took that nod as all the agreement they needed to proceed.

"George Lore, do you swear to uphold the safety and sanctity of this SMP? To protect its citizens and maintain order among its lands?"

George raised his right hand, straightening his back. "I swear."

"Then, by my power, I grant you the title of Admin, and all that comes with it." Two starry fingers reached out, coming to rest on the centre of George's forehead. "May you prove yourself more worthy of the post than your predecessor."

Power flooded through George, wrapping around him in ribbons of light. It was so blinding that Sapnap had to take a few steps back, shielding his eyes from the light show. As it died down, XD had vanished from sight, leaving the two alone in their cottagecore prison. Blinking spots from his eyes, Sapnap cautiously returned to George's side.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

George opened and closed his hands, soft blue lights dancing along his fingertips.

"Like... I can finally make up for everything."

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is Victim or Survivor by Citizen Soldier and Icon For Hire.

Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Status updates ft. the best bois, a repenting president, and a green monster

Chapter Notes

Here we are again, another new chapter. As usual, shout-out to Author_of_Insanity101, my lovely co-author/beta. She wrote much of this chapter so give her love.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Never in Ranboo's life did he think he would find himself sitting in a bathtub and enjoying himself. Because of his Enderman heritage, he unfortunately suffered from his species' severe aquagenic urticaria. Touching water was akin to touching acid. Even his own tears would leave burns on his skin that would ache for days. But apparently, not anymore.

After the strange visit from the server God XD, Ranboo had been miraculously cured. It had taken a couple days to fully figure out what the deity's words had meant, but an accidental drink spill had made it perfectly clear. Water no longer burned him, unless it was super hot of course. Even the burns on his face left by his tears had been erased (which in hindsight should have made it obvious). Upon this discovery, he knew exactly what he had to do, something that was long overdue.

And that was how he found himself sitting in Sam's massive, in-ground bathtub, alongside a quiet Tommy.

Since the tub had been made to accommodate Sam's creeper physique, it was more than big enough for the two of them to sit comfortably. This worked out for Ranboo since Tommy was in no condition to be left alone, physically or mentally. He had Tommy sit on a small stool Sam had quickly made for the tub, using a soft washcloth and soap that smelled like flowers to clean the boy.

"You're already looking better," he commented, taking Tommy's arm in hand to clean it. "Your colour's returned and after the bath, I'm sure you'll feel better too."

Tommy hummed noncommittally, just watching Ranboo as he worked. The boy had remained quiet ever since coming out of his coma, always answering any questions with hums or shaking his head. It left Ranboo missing his friend's usual insults and bravado, longing to hear even that stupid Boob Boy nickname.

As he finished cleaning Tommy's body, he switched to shampoo, one Sam had picked up that was perfect for damaged hair. With a healthy glob in hand, Ranboo got to work gently scrubbing the boy's head.

"Please let me know if I'm being too rough," he requested, lightly scratching at Tommy's scalp with his claws. "My claws are a bit long and the last thing I want is to hurt you in any way."

This time, Tommy didn't respond. His gaze seemed distant, like he was off in another world. Ranboo *vwooped* lightly, longing to offer comfort to his friend. Unfortunately, he was already doing the most he could, and sadly, it didn't seem to be enough.

As Ranboo carefully poured a basin of water over Tommy's hair to rinse it, the boy finally moved. A hand came up, gently grasping Ranboo's wrist. Specifically, it grasped the golden shackle still sealed on his wrist. The boy's brow was furrowed, like he was seeing them for the first time.

"Ranboo..." the boy croaked, his voice still a bit rough from his bronchitis, "why are you wearing these in the bath? Shouldn't you take them off?"

For a moment, the Ender considered telling a little white lie. He contemplated saying something about how gold never corrodes, or how he had just forgotten. However, he could see from the look in Tommy's eyes that he already had some idea of why. So, with a sigh, Ranboo gently removed the boy's hand from his shackle.

"I can't," he admitted. "Back in the Bastion, something happened. I don't remember what, but... I got injured. The piglins took care of me but... they also decided to *decorate* me. To... solidify your claim on me..."

Tommy was silent, just staring at Ranboo's shackles. After a brief moment, his face crumbled and he broke down, sobbing quietly.

"I'm sorry..." he whimpered, sounding so small and remorseful. "I'm so sorry..."

Immediately, the Ender dropped to his knees and pulled the boy into a hug.

"Hey, hey," he soothed, rubbing Tommy's back slowly. "Don't cry. There's nothing to be sorry about."

"Yes there is!" It was the loudest the boy had been since their rescue, but his voice was like shattered glass, breaking at every word as he openly sobbed. "I got Sam and Ponk *killed*, Ranboo! And- And you... you've been *collared and shackled*! Like-like you're some sort of *pet*! Everyone thinks I *own* you now and- and-"

"Hey." Ranboo took Tommy's face in both of his hands, making the boy meet his eyes. He hated eye contact, but with Tommy, it was different. "Hey, look at me. You didn't get them killed, alright? That was Dream."

"But-" Tommy sniffled, "But Dream-"

“-is a psychotic bastard who gets off on making people suffer. Their deaths are on his hands, not yours. It wasn’t your fault. Say it.”

“But-”

“Say it, Tommy.”

Another sniffle. “It... wasn’t my fault.”

Ranboo nodded at that, churring happily. His grip on Tommy softened a bit as he put a hand to his collar.

“And as for this, do you want to know what I see when I look at it?” The Ender gave his friend a warm, grateful smile. “I see proof that I made the right choice. You were so sick you could barely stand, and yet you *punched a Piglin Brute* to help me. More than that, when you pulled all those leads off of me, do you remember what you said to me?”

Tommy shook his head, which didn’t surprise Ranboo at all. Given his delirium at the time, his mind had likely written it off as a fever dream.

“You asked me if I trusted you. And I didn’t hesitate to say yes. You claimed me and that kept me safe. All this gold? I see it as you *choosing* me, just like I chose you. So who cares if I can’t take it off? I don’t want to. Let everyone think that you own me. I’m *proud* to belong to you. Because Tommy... you’re the best choice I ever made, because you chose me right back”

Tommy sniffled again, then broke down into sobs once more. Without hesitation, Ranboo held him once more, rubbing his back and letting him cry. This time, Tommy clung to him, holding him tightly as if he never wanted to let go. It made the Ender smile as he ran his claws through the boy’s hair.

He’d meant every word. Tommy was worth everything he’d gone through, and no matter how long it took, he would help the boy realise it.

Tubbo didn’t know what to make of his current circumstances. He wasn’t sure how long it had been since he’d fled L’Manberg, but after his run-in with that witch, he’d been a prisoner of a massive army of pillagers.

Several days ago, he’d woken up in a shallow, stone hole, one with a metal grate covering the entrance. His inventory had been completely emptied, save for the compass Ghostbur had given him, and his clothes had been changed. He now wore a sleeveless tunic that looked akin to what Vindicators wore, and a pair of dark trousers to match. His hands were also trapped in a pair of wooden cuffs, leaving them stuck in front of his body.

Oddly enough, his imprisonment was not an uncomfortable one.

He had a bedroll he slept on that offered him comfort from the stone floor, and it even came with a blanket and a small pillow. He’d expected maybe a pile of hay, or just making due

with the harsh ground, but the bedding was there and it was clean.

There was a bell that rang three times a day, and each time that bell rang, a basket of food would be lowered into his prison. Good food too, which was the most surprising thing. Dried meats, fresh veggies, and a glass bottle of milk. His captors always made sure he ate it all before reclaiming the basket.

Then, and this was the most confusing part, there were his daily walks. Once a day, usually after the second bell, the grate above his cell was opened and he was pulled out. A rope would be attached to his wooden cuffs and he would be taken for a walk around the encampment. They would make a long, meandering lap around the place, then he would be returned to his cell to await the dinner bell. It didn't seem to serve much of a purpose, but he'd be lying if he said that getting the chance to stretch his legs wasn't nice.

Today, things seemed to be going a bit differently from the routine. While he was being taken on his daily walk, Tubbo was escorted over to what the goat child could only describe as a make-shift arena. It was a large circle of dirt surrounded by rocks, and a few half-cut logs that served as benches. There were a few spectator's scattered about the benches, but Tubbo's attention was drawn to the centre of the ring.

A tall, imposing Vindicator was standing with his arms crossed, a name tag dangling from his ear like an earring. Squinting slightly, Tubbo could *just* make out the word "Johnny" stamped on it. He must have been the leader since he had been given a name.

His escort pulled the key for his cuffs off their belt, unlocking them and letting them fall to the ground. Tubbo rubbed his wrists in confusion, then a wooden sword was held out to him, handle out.

He stared at the sword blankly, wondering why his captors were handing him any sort of weapon. When it became clear that he wasn't reaching out to take it, the sword was shoved into his hands. Tubbo glanced up at that to judge how the Pillagers were reacting to this action.

The name-tagged Vindicator, Johnny, gave a somewhat impatient huff, then got into what looked like a very basic sword fighting stance. Tubbo mimicked him as the situation slowly became clear to him. They wanted him to train but the why eluded him. Instead, he pushed that concern away and breathed deeply before bringing his sword up to parry Johnny's first swing.

His swings and parries were met with light correction, a tap with the sword on either his arms or legs to adjust them into the right position. Soon, he was getting into the rhythm of everything, matching Johnny's moves and predicting his attacks. After several minutes of this, Johnny backed off, nodding while giving an affirmative grunt.

Just as Tubbo prepared to return the wooden sword, an illusionist stepped into the ring. Following behind him was a pillager dragging what looked to be one of the straw dummies from the practice range. The goat boy's brow furrowed in confusion as the dummy was erected right in the centre of the arena, especially when he was lightly pushed toward the

dummy. Thinking that he was to continue practice on his own, he raised his sword again, but the illusionist held up a hand to stop him.

Before Tubbo could question why, the illusionist waved his hands in a mystical manner, gathering his magic. He cast it over the dummy, a shimmering image falling over it. Tubbo gasped, taking a step back as the dummy was replaced with an image of the one person he hadn't seen in months.

"Tommy..." he whispered.

Johnny picked up Tubbo's fallen sword, attempting to hand it to him. Immediately, the goat boy practically screamed, backing away with his hands up.

"No! I won't attack Tommy! I don't care if it's an illusion! I won't!"

He'd hurt his friend more than enough. He wouldn't be turned into a weapon against him, not again! He didn't care what they did to him, or how badly they hurt him! They could take his final Canon life and he *still* wouldn't do anything against even the illusionary Tommy!

However, that's when the odd, comforting noises of his captors made him pause. All of them were waving their arms and shaking their heads, performing various pantomimes that said the same thing, "you're not going to hurt him." Slowly, Tubbo lowered his hands as Johnny took the boy's arm, arranging him so Tubbo was between the Tommy illusion and everyone else. The sword was pushed back into his hand, then he was given a small shield.

Tubbo was so confused, right up until Johnny poked at the shield, then poked the boy in the chest. That's when it clicked.

"You... you're not making me into a weapon against Tommy... you're making me into a shield *for* Tommy..."

Johnny nodded at that, then got into that same fighting stance from before. Immediately, Tubbo matched the stance, readying his shield and preparing to strike. When the attack came, the boy didn't hesitate, throwing his all into the fight.

The Pillagers wanted him to be Tommy's shield, so he would be. He would do what he should have done from the beginning: protect his friend. And this time, he wouldn't fail. This time, he would be a better friend.

Life in the Bastion was a living hell, one Dream had yet to find an escape from. The brutish beasts that held him prisoner never gave him so much as a scrap of freedom or leeway. The chains XD had cursed him with made moving difficult, and the constant abuse from the savage piglins made it downright painful.

Every day, he was dragged out of his tiny, dark oven of a cell and dragged out to do whatever backbreaking, humiliating labour the piglins could come up with. Sometimes it was scraping crimson nylium off the walls, sometimes it was shovelling manure in the Hoglin pens, and

sometimes he was made to transport massive loads of blackstone from the local mines. Today seemed to be a mining day as his captors dragged him down one of the damn holes in the nearby basalt delta.

The piglins didn't make him mine the blackstone, just transport it. Hell, if he so much as glanced at a pickaxe, he would be lashed so many times that it was a miracle (or a curse) that he didn't die. And, of course, once the beating was done, a potion would be splashed over him, healing Dream's wounds *just* enough that he could get back to work.

Dream was brought to a large, crude cart, one that looked like a rough carriage carved from crimson stem. It had small wheels and a hitching pole for a beast of burden. In this case, that beast was him. He was chained to the post as stack after stack of the blackstone ore was loaded up, easily twice as much as a normal cart. Once it was full, a whip cracked down on Dream's back and he was made to walk.

With every step he took, straining to drag the cart behind him, Dream silently seethed. He pushed through the pain and exhaustion, imagining the revenge he would get when he finally escaped. He imagined breaking free of his chains, of slaughtering every last piglin in this entire Prime-forsaken Bastion. He imagined getting his hands on Tommy again, of making him watch the slaughter. And then, he'd kill Ranboo, taking his slow, sweet time in punishing his stupid puppet. And then...

The crack of the whip on his back made Dream cry out, falling to his knees. The weight of the cart dragged him back and he could hear piglins snorting in distress. The whip came down again and again, forcing Dream to curl up on himself in an attempt to mitigate the damage.

Eventually, he felt liquid splash his skin and he knew that the whipping was done for now but that if he didn't get up and back to work, the piglins wouldn't feed him. Frankly, he considered just staying down in protest of all this but he knew he needed food. He'd been starved for days, having not done enough to "earn" whatever garbage and refuse they threw in his meal trough. The starvation was sapping his strength and the only thing that was keeping him himself was his resolve to escape and get what he wanted.

Slowly, mindful of the still-tender skin of his back, he rose to his feet and slowly resumed his arduous trek.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is Both Ways by The Script.

Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

New building plans, another enhanced interrogation, and teaching (lecturing) an old dog into new tricks

Chapter Notes

As usual, shout-out to Author_of_Insanity101, my lovely co-author/beta. She (re-)wrote much of this chapter so give her all the love.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was a beautiful day in the Badlands, the mountain biome maintaining a pleasantly cool temperature even in the midst of winter. Sam stepped out of his bunker home, taking in a deep breath of fresh air. As he exhaled, he smiled before grabbing his saddle bags and plopping them onto his haunches. They were already full of the materials he wanted and he couldn't help but get excited.

As much as Sam and Ponk enjoyed having the two boys around, the Creeper's bunker was not the most ideal place for two teens to live. This was especially true for Tommy, who was in desperate need of fresh air and freedom. Of course, neither of the adults wanted to leave either of the boys to fend for themselves, so they'd come up with a plan.

Sam was building them a tower.

Tommy had a well-known affinity for towers, especially those of the cobblestone variety. Of course, the boy's towers tended to be on the simplistic side, not ideal for living in. That was where Sam came in. He'd been carefully observing both Tommy and Ranboo since the former had recovered from his illness, noting down everything that he would need.

Walking a bit away from where his bunker entrance was, Sam stepped out onto a small hill. It had a beautiful view of the land, which included a large area that was perfect for an animal pen. Given Tommy's new affinity for animals, having somewhere for those who chose to stick would benefit them in the long run.

Sam pulled out some blocks of wool from his inventory, laying out a basic outline of what he was thinking. He made a circular base for the tower, then outlined where the fence would go. He blocked out a large barn, one that could easily house several animals comfortably. Then, as a final little detail, he laid out a single strip of wool overlooking the valley. It was placed

on a spot with one of the best spots to watch the sun set. Perfect for a bench, just like the one in Tommy's old home.

With the last of the outline laid out, Sam decided to take a break. He wandered over to a large, shady tree near his bunker entrance, lowering to the ground before fishing out his notebook. He just summoned a pen to start writing when he heard a hiss next to him. He glanced over, spotting a feral creeper eyeing the book.

"What are you working on?" it asked.

In answer, Sam held the notebook out for the Creeper to see. "I'm planning out what I need for Tommy's tower. How much space, materials, that kind of stuff."

The book was already full of observations he'd made about Tommy and his preferences. For example, he'd noted down the need for open spaces that still provided security. The barn was already set to be an open affair with the fence being the only real means of containing any animals that stayed. Having the freedom to leave was something Tommy was keen on.

Another was storage and security when it came to resources. Tommy was constantly afraid of losing what little he had, afraid of having it taken from him. It even extended to Ranboo, with the Enderman finding himself needing to be almost constantly by the boy's side. Ponk hypothesised that having a space that was solely theirs would help Tommy's anxiety.

"You have put much thought into this," the Creeper commended, nodding in approval. *"What aid can we offer?"*

Sam flipped the page in his book to where materials were listed. "Well, if you want, I am in need of cobblestone. The normal kind and the deepslate variety. Ponk also suggested using moss to soften the stone and add some colour."

The Creeper nodded in agreement. *"The Green Monster's cage was barren and cold. Moss is life. Moss brings colour."*

"Sounds like you and Ponk are on the same page. I was also thinking of planting some trees and letting some flowers grow nearby. Maybe even some planter boxes in the windows. I know Ranboo likes Alliums so it would help him too."

"Yes, the Split Ender. The Golden Child chose well with them."

Sam could only nod in agreement. If Ranboo hadn't shown up when he did, if Tommy had been alone all this time... it made the Creeper hybrid shudder at the thought. That reminded him, he needed to make sure the tower's bed was big enough for both of them. With as many soft blankets as he could find.

"Lemonade break!" Ponk called out, walking out of the bunker with a pair of glasses.

Sam turned and smiled at the doctor, his feral friend taking their leave as Ponk came and sat down next to him. Sam took the offered glass, taking a big drink.

"I take it this means your transplanted lemon trees are thriving?"

“Absolutely, and my herb garden is flourishing too. I’ve never had such a promising harvest.” Ponk was grinning openly, having discarded their mask for Tommy’s comfort. Sam would have done the same, but still needed his gas mask for everyone’s safety. He still tried to take it off when he could and had gotten rid of the attached visor at least. “I’m pretty sure the world is telling me that it wants me to stay.”

“So long as that’s what you want,” Sam pressed. “I don’t want you to feel pressured to leave Lemon City behind.”

“You mean my empty city full of nothing but cats?” Ponk scoffed, rolling their eyes. “Yeah, pass. Besides, I’m needed here. More than that, I’m *wanted* here.”

Sam smiled, then wrapped an arm around Ponk so the doctor would lean on him. Both of them closed their eyes, allowing themselves a moment to just relax and enjoy the peace. After all the madness that followed Dream’s reveal, it felt like neither of them had stopped moving or fretting. For the first time in weeks, everything was calm.

Of course, something had to ruin it.

There was the sound of a twig snapping, one that came from the woods that sat between the Badlands and the rest of the server. Instinctively, Sam knew that it wasn’t a mob or some friendly creature coming to say hi. Ponk seemed to share his sentiments, having summoned their hoes for protection.

Moving cautiously, the two Players moved toward where they’d heard the sound, approaching the treeline with weapons drawn.

“Do you think it’s someone from the Greater SMP area?” Sam whispered.

“I don’t care who it is,” Ponk snarled. “The last thing we need right now are players sniffing around during such a critical period in Tommy’s healing.”

“I’m not denying that, but not all of them are hopeless. I know we’ve discussed calling Puffy over, and Tubbo was Tommy’s best friend.”

“I’m willing to give Tubbo a chance, definitely Puffy and maybe the other Badlanders. But the rest...” The doctor shook their head. “All of them only care about him when it’s *convenient*. Especially-”

“Wilbur...”

“Yeah, exactly!” Ponk pointed at Sam while nodding. “Wilbur was the absolute worst! And the rest of them are just as-!”

“No.” Sam cut off, staring at something poking through the brush. “Wilbur.”

There, splayed out on the ground just on the edge of the forest, was Wilbur. A filthy, fully corporeal, *alive* Wilbur. That last part was speculation, given that he was face first in the dirt, but the fact that he wasn’t see-through or blue made his animate state.

“What,” Ponk hissed, “is *he* doing here? How the fuck is he alive, and how did he wind up *here*?! Of all places, how did he manage to wind up right on the doorstep of Tommy’s safehouse?!”

Sam’s face hardened, even as his tone levelled out. “Those feel like questions we should be asking the man himself. Throw him over my back and let’s get him inside.”

Ponk turned a disbelieving eye to Sam, the Creeper hybrid withering under the heat of their glare. “You want to bring him into the same space as Tommy? Are you mad?!”

“I’m not exactly thrilled about it either, but I’m less thrilled at the thought of him being free to drag Tommy into whatever toxic mind games he’s got planned. Plus, look at him.” Sam bent down and picked up Wilbur by the collar of his coat, revealing just how dishevelled the man looked. “If we leave him out here, he’s likely to die again and I do *not* want his rotting corpse polluting the land that will soon be Tommy’s home.”

Picking up Wilbur the way he did had a second purpose: it showed the SMP’s doctor just how bad the man was. Even with their disdain for the former L’Manberg founder, Ponk couldn’t in good conscience ignore a patient. With a snarl, they threw up their hands in surrender.

“Fine! Fine, let’s get him inside!” He took Wilbur from Sam, throwing the limp body over the Creeper hybrid’s haunches. “Don’t think I don’t know what you just did there.”

Sam said nothing as they made their way back into the bunker.

A sudden deluge of cold water snapped Wilbur back into the world of the living. He coughed and sputtered, spitting out the water as best he could, attempting to blink the droplets from his eyes. He tried to move his hands, but found that they were trapped behind his back. This led him to realise that he was tied to a chair, definitely not a good sign, especially with the violence of his awakening.

As his vision cleared, he was able to make out smooth stone walls and a single lantern hanging from the ceiling. The room itself was small and empty, save for the chair he was on, and a small table in the corner. On that table was the meagre contents of Wilbur’s inventory, which surprisingly included the blue cow plush Ghostbur had been working on. Had Ghostbur’s inventory collided with his own? If so, he’d been in such a panic after waking up in the button room he hadn’t noticed.

Putting that aside for the moment, Wilbur turned his attention to the more pressing detail of his makeshift prison, which were the two figures that were towering over him. Attempting to focus on the figures that were likely his captors, one of them moved with practised ease. Pressure was applied to Wilbur’s neck and he found himself staring down the handle of a netherite hoe, the flat blade pressed against his throat. He swallowed as best he could, finally making out the two people who now held him prisoner: Sam and Ponk.

For a brief moment, Wilbur was confused. Neither of them had really been part of the L’Manberg Revolution, nor had they participated in the Manberg Civil War. As such, they

weren't exactly at the top of the list of people who wanted him dead. Still, it's not like he could blame them for locking him up the moment he was caught. He was a fucked up mess back before he died and he deserved to be mistrusted like this.

"Hey," he greeted softly, attempting a smile. "I'd ask if you missed me, but I'm pretty sure I know the answer."

"What," Ponk's voice was as sharp as steel, "are you doing around here? You have no business 'round these parts."

"I got lost." Prime, that sounded like the *lamest* excuse in existence. "I know that sounds like a lie, but it's the truth. Everything's changed since I've been... gone... and my glasses were broken when I revived. I can still see a bit, but not much."

At least that last part could be verified. Ponk had been the one to help him keep up with his glasses and contacts, so they knew he was telling the truth about his deplorable sight.

The pressure against his throat eased the slightest bit, but not enough that Wilbur felt comfortable about relaxing. He watched both of his captors with careful eyes, waiting to see what would happen. Finally, Sam spoke up.

"How are you alive?"

"A ritual," he supplied, his memories of it being perhaps the clearest of the ones he got from Ghostbur. "Ghostbur managed to get this revive book. I don't know how, but it managed to clear the fog in his... in my head. I brought the book to Phil, then he and Techno helped me with a ritual that... well... revived me."

"Why did you come back?" Ponk pressed, digging the blade of the hoe into his throat once more. "How could any of you ever think that bringing you back from the dead was a good idea?!"

Wilbur dropped his eyes to stare contemplatively at the floor. "Because as Ghostbur... I couldn't be there for Tommy."

This answer seemed to surprise Sam, but Ponk still seemed bitter and defensive. Lifting his gaze, Wilbur met their eyes and spoke.

"I failed him. I won't deny it, or sugarcoat it. I failed Tommy." Behind his back, Wilbur's fists clenched. "I was a selfish, abusive, manipulative, psychotic asshole who was so caught up in my own drama that I didn't care who I hurt. And even as a ghost, I couldn't do anything right. I refused to think about things that made me upset and I ignored anyone who tried to make me see sense. But..."

"But...?" Sam prompted.

"But then, Ghostbur saw Tommy in Techno's barn. He-... I saw... Prime..." He was on the verge of tears, choking on the lump in his throat. "I saw what this world had done to him... to my *brother*. Even as Ghostbur, I wanted to help, and when I got the Revive Book in my

hand... it was like I was finally thinking clearly for the first time in... Prime only knows how long.”

He needed a moment to compose himself, his voice cracking from the onslaught of pain and emotion. By this point, even Ponk seemed to be realising his sincerity, the hoe no longer pressed against his neck.

“The ritual sent me back to L’Manberg, to where I died. I managed to break out of my tomb and Puffy helped me get out of town. I was trying to get to the arctic, to where Phil and Techno are. But, I got lost... then hungry... and here I am.”

“Then... you didn’t come here for Tommy?” Ponk asked, sounding surprised.

At that, Wilbur could only shake his head sadly. “No. I’m in no condition to see him, and I know he doesn’t want to see me. More than that, I don’t want to force him to do anything he’s not ready to do. As much as I want to see him and tell him how sorry I am... This isn’t about what I want. Not this time.”

Before this oddly therapeutic interrogation could continue, there was a noise from the door. All three of the room’s occupants turned, seeing that it was slightly ajar and two eyes could be seen peeking through the crack. One red eye, and one brilliant blue that Wilbur would recognize anywhere.

“Tommy...” he whispered.

Likely realising they had been caught, the door slid open slowly. From the door emerged the two teens, with Ranboo holding Tommy in a protective manner. Wilbur’s heart ached, remembering when it had been him holding a much younger Tommy, protecting him from the world. Now, it was him Tommy needed protection from.

“Do you really mean that?” Tommy’s voice was quiet and rough, which only saddened Wilbur more. His baby brother had always been loud and exuberant in nature and this departure from his old normal hurt.

Swallowing harshly, Wilbur mustered as much of a smile as he could. “Yeah Toms, I really do.”

“How can we trust you?” Ranboo snarled, pulling Tommy closer to him.

“You can’t,” he replied, the words bitter on his tongue. “I’ve done nothing to merit your trust. But... I want to earn it. No matter how long it takes or what I have to do.”

There was a long moment of silence, everyone staring at Wilbur with varying expressions. Confusion, distrust, weariness, and in the case of Tommy, tentative hope. After a moment, the teen spared a glance at the table with Wilbur’s things, spotting the cow plush.

“Did... is that for me?”

“Yeah,” Wilbur nodded. “Ghostbur made it for you. He got Friend to help him with it and spent days trying to make it perfect. It’s even got Blue in it. Y’know... to take your sadness

away.”

Slowly, Tommy reached out for the table, taking the plush in hand before hugging it close to his chest. Holding the toy seemed to loosen something in the boy because he shuddered slightly, gripping it tight before leaning back into Ranboo.

“I... don’t know if I can forgive you...” he admitted through quiet tears. “At least... not yet.”

Wilbur shook his head. “I don’t want you to forgive me right away. I haven’t done anything to earn it from you, and as someone who was once part of your family, my failings are worse and more painful. You shouldn’t just let that go because of some pretty words. Besides, you know what I’m like, all pretty words and nonsense.”

“Then show him,” Sam spoke up, his voice gentle for the first time since Wilbur woke up. This was followed by the ropes around the man’s wrist loosening. “Prove that everything you’ve said wasn’t just pretty words.”

“My suggestion, call Puffy,” Ponk chimed in, still a bit short but much less inclined to murder. “Prime knows you need therapy.”

Slowly, Wilbur stood up from his seat, rubbing his wrists. His eyes fell on his little brother, who was still clutching the stuffie while being cradled by Ranboo. While it still hurt to see Tommy taking comfort from another, he felt secure that his brother was in good hands.

“I will,” he promised. “And Tommy... I am sorry. For everything I did and didn’t do. And I hope that one day... I can be the brother you deserve.”

Things had become quite chaotic in Technoblade’s cabin, something that didn’t go unnoticed by the animals that called his domain home. A second cabin was being constructed next door, a home for the Ancient Crow who called the Blood God a friend. Then, there was the addition of the undead brother, who came wandering through the snow under the careful guidance of the Creeper Hybrid’s wolf.

Baba stared at the trio that had laid claim to the title of the cub’s family with a level of contemptuousness that most would feel a polar bear was not capable of. These three adults had the highest responsibility and thus the biggest failings. She could at least grant the undead one the most grace, having been beyond for the period of the greatest negligence. The other two, however, were not excused.

She eyed Technoblade, the one who had given her a home in his territory, feeling a slight softening in her temper. He may have failed, but when he learned of his mistakes, he acted to rectify them. More than that, he acted in accordance with the wishes of those who were supporting the cub. She wasn’t *quite* ready to trust him near the cub, but he was showing change. Perhaps in time... *lots* of time.

The winged one, however, she snorted at. As the oldest of them all, he had the greatest duty of care to the cub and his dereliction of that duty was the highest offence. His unwillingness

to accept that he was not the best person to help solve the situation did nothing to endear him to her. In fact, his voice caught her attention, drawing Baba out of her thoughts.

“You *saw* Tommy with Sam and Ponk and didn’t try to bring him home?!” Wings flaring in agitation as the robed one paced up and down the snow-covered ground. “He should be here with us! Hell, he never should have been taken from the Arctic in the first place!”

Technoblade sighed, exasperation clear. “Dunno what I didn’t explain clearly beforehand but frankly, Tommy was sick enough that Ponk would have been the better choice than me anyway. My skill in medicine is limited to battlefield medicine and as Tommy didn’t need an amputation, those skills wouldn’t have been helpful. Sides, with the lung infection he was rocking, he really shouldn’t be in the arctic. He couldn’t really recover here. It’s for the best that he’s not here.”

“Techno’s right,” Wilbur agreed. “I remember what he looked like when Ghostbur saw him. It wasn’t pretty. But now he’s looking physically better.”

The Ancient Crow did not look convinced, and so the Blood God spoke up once more.

“More than that, we have no say in this anymore. Tommy went with them willingly and the animals let them. Meaning that they were trusted. And considering none of us did a damn thing to help Tommy, I don’t blame them.”

“He’s *my* son. *Your* brother!” The crow was growing almost erratic. “How are you both okay with this?!”

“Phil,” the undead one, stress clear in his posture, “what will it help if we march over to Sam’s and demand he hand Tommy over to us like he’s an object? Even if Sam and Ponk don’t straight up *murder* us for that implication, what would it convey to Tommy? That he only matters when it’s clear to everyone that someone’s hurt him, that that’s how and why we care? That’s helping yourself, not him. Get your head on right!”

Baba found her opinion of the undead man steadily improving. Meanwhile Phil, wings drooping, sank into the snow, devastation written clear across his face.

“I want to help him...”

The undead one was having none of that. “Phil, if that were true, you would have been there for him after I made you kill me. Get this through your head, you can’t fix this, not now and not like that.”

“But-”

“Phil, no.” Technoblade sounded so tired. “All we can do is move forward from the mess we’re in, so stop dwelling in the past. If, and that’s a big if, Tommy decides he wants anything to do with us, he’ll let us know.”

Baba snorted in satisfaction upon hearing this, laying back down and closing her eyes. The Golden Cub’s old family was still rough around the edges, but at least two of them were

thinking about what the boy wanted. Perhaps they would manage to convince the old crow to let go of his stubborn possessiveness around the boy.

Only then would the world deem him ready.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is Unpopular by Skillet.

Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Puffy is really, truly tired, Bad and Skeppy bake and fret, and the Testificates plan a graduation ceremony

Chapter Notes

As usual, shout-out to Author_of_Insanity101, my lovely co-author/beta. She wrote much of this chapter (most of sections 1 and 2) so give her all the love.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Puffy crashed face-first on her bed in her ship, not even bothering to remove her boots. She had been out searching all day, but not as part of the quickly disintegrating Dream Manhunt. No, she was out trying to find Tubbo.

It had been weeks since the meeting where Tubbo had run out. She had attempted to give chase, but had been forced to retreat by three different Ravagers. Since then, she'd scoured all of Tubbo's hiding places and his distant builds, trying to find him. She'd even taken a boat out to Logstedshire on the off chance he might have gone there. (The less said about her visceral reaction to being on that Prime-forsaken island, the better) But it was like Tubbo had just... vanished.

Rolling over on her bed, Puffy rubbed her face before closing her eyes. She felt like such a failure, being unable to help the children of this server. She hadn't seen the signs when it came to Tommy, she'd let Tubbo vanish, she didn't even *know* where Ranboo was... and Dream...

Immediately, Puffy shook her head, banishing all thoughts of that... monster from her mind. Dream was no duckling of hers. Not anymore.

A chime from her comm went off beside her and she groaned. She wanted so desperately to turn it off, to ignore whatever drama was being stirred up by the Manhunt crew. Still, she knew she couldn't afford to miss anything of note, especially if it had something to do with any of the kids on the server. And so, she sat up and grabbed her comm. Unkindly, she hoped it wasn't a member of the manhunt writing to complain about Quackity. She wasn't sure she could take any more of his nonsense.

[awesamdude whispered to you: How soon could you come out here for a therapy consultation for the two teenagers I have with me?]

Those words eased her aching heart, with the clear indication that two of the three missing teens were somewhere safe. Unfortunately, that did mean whichever teen was not with Sam was still in the wind.

Her gut was telling her the missing teen was likely Tubbo. Ranboo's last known location was with Tommy, and knowing the Enderman's character, he wouldn't abandon his friend. And despite the disappointment and dread of still not having located Tubbo, the allure of checking up on both Tommy and Ranboo was enough for her to push aside her exhaustion.

[You whispered to awesamdude: I'm free right now.]

[You whispered to awesamdude: Are you at your place in the Badlands?]

If they were, then that meant Tommy wasn't still in an arctic barn. It meant he was somewhere warm and safe and not alone. It meant that someone had stepped up where she had been too crippled by grief to act.

[awesamdude whispered to you: Yeah. We are.]

[awesamdude whispered to you: And Puffy...]

[awesamdude whispered to you: Please don't let anyone else know.]

An understandable request. The SMP was, for lack of less crass terminology, a fucking shitstorm. It was impossible to tell who could be trusted and who wasn't a walking dumpster fire. The toxicity of some of the Players was horrible and absolutely *not* what Tommy needed.

[You whispered to awesamdude: Don't worry, I won't.]

[You whispered to awesamdude: I'm glad he's somewhere safe.]

Her exhaustion wiped away for the time being, Puffy got up and straightened out her wool. She grabbed some fresh provisions, as well as her notebook and a blanket. With everything ready, she stepped off her ship and began her trek for the Badlands. Hopefully, her presence would help show Tommy that he did have people on her side.

And hopefully, seeing him could help her to let go of at least a little of her crippling guilt.

Bad and Skeppy couldn't handle Quackity's tyranny any longer. The manhunt for Dream had turned into little more than another Civil War, and frankly, both of them had seen enough conflict. They'd dropped out of the hunt pretty early on, retreating to their mansion to make their own plans.

Thus, they were likely the only ones who noticed when Sam and Ponk mysteriously died in lava.

Since Sam was a member of the Badlands, just like them, Bad and Skeppy had been quick to go and check on their neighbour, only to see him running out of his home with fresh burns and murder in his eyes. Of course, they followed him, witnessing the brutal interrogation of Punz and how Sam and Ponk had practically bolted off to the Nether.

From there, it hadn't taken long for Bad and Skeppy to shift their plans. Rather than be part of some stupid hunt that was devolving more and more each day, they decided their time would be better suited supporting the newest Badlanders. They returned to their manor with a renewed confidence and a much better plan.

Step one: Muffins.

"Do you think Tommy still likes chocolate muffins?" Bad asked as he pulled his latest batch out of the oven. They were piping hot and perfectly fresh.

"I should hope so," Skeppy chimed in, arranging a basket with a clean, corduroy cloth to keep the contents covered. "Did you remember the sweetberry ones for Ranboo?"

"Of course I did!" Bad reached into the second oven, pulling out the aforementioned muffins. "Both of them deserve to have some freshly baked goods they enjoy. All we need now are the rest of the offerings."

"I've already got Tommy's gift ready. Just need to figure out what Ranboo would like."

"Funny you should mention that." Bad smiled, albeit sheepishly as he rubbed the back of his head. "I *hmay* ave gone snooping in Ranboo's house in L'Manberg."

Ranboo's house had been all but abandoned in the wake of the Ender Hybrid's disappearance. Of course, Bad and Skeppy knew that he was now living with Sam, Tommy, and Ponk in the Badlands, so it was unlikely he would ever return. He'd left some materials behind, along with some riches and a few weapons. However, those weren't the offerings that Bad was referring to.

From under the table, the demon pulled out a new basket. This one was larger than the one meant to hold the muffins and had much nicer, thicker lining. Napping in the basket, a simple bow with an Eye of Ender tied around her neck, was a black cat.

"Meet Enderchest, Ranboo's kitten." Bad gently scratched behind the cat's ear, receiving a large yawn in response. "I get the feeling he's going to be very happy to see her again."

"Bad, that's perfect!" Skeppy couldn't help but gush over the kitten, approaching the basket and gently petting the cat's soft fur. "And even better, with Tommy's affinity for animals, she's a gift that will benefit him too."

"I know." Bad's face faltered ever so slightly. "Still... it's important we give him his gift too."

Skeppy's face fell at that and he solemnly turned toward the corner of the room. There, an ender chest was glowing faintly, the magical particles of its unique energy floating around it.

He approached like a condemned man, opening the magical chest before pulling out something he wished he'd never taken.

Tommy's precious disc, Cat.

Dream had passed it to him as part of a prank that Dream was planning on playing on Tommy, or at least, that's what Dream had told him. After learning what they had about Dream, Skeppy had come to the realisation that he had been used indirectly in Dream's broader plot of tormenting Tommy.

"We never should have held onto this as long as we did," the gem golem muttered, tucking the disc into his inventory. "We should have given it back..."

"We should have, yeah..." Bad's tail flicked nervously before wrapping around him. "But we can't change the past."

"No, we can't." Skeppy took a deep breath, regaining his senses before letting it out. "But we can try to build a better future. One where we finally do the right thing."

The two shared a nod and a hopeful smile. They gathered their treats and gifts, making sure everything was neat and tidy. Then, arm in arm, they began their trek toward Sam's bunker.

The goat child was progressing well with their training, showing great improvement with their skills. Their endurance had grown over the weeks since their capture and they were growing visibly stronger. The camp's tailor even had to let out the boy's clothes to better fit him.

Of course, this growth came with a new set of challenges for the Pillagers.

In their society, they were very much of the mindset of the strong ruling over the weak. Their ruling council was always made of the strongest of each of their factions, the ones who bested their predecessors in duels for the position. As such, while they recognized strength and praised it, there was also fear and respect.

In the case of the goat boy, there were those who worried about what would happen if he grew too strong. Would he be content with being a guard for the Golden Child? Or would he strive for more? Would he rebel against the boy like he had when the Green Monster had been in power?

These were questions that were brought to the table at the next Leadership Conference. Sitting up at the top of the tower, the members stared down at the field in which the goat child was running drills with the other trainees. Even from a distance, his skills were visible, and it was clear he was outpacing the others by a fair margin.

The Illusionist leader grumbled to the others, *"How can we be sure that that one does not turn on the Golden Child again? Especially since we were the ones to give him the training? Would we not be responsible for how he might misuse it?"*

“Do you not remember how he reacted when your disciple cast the illusion on the dummy the first time?” the Witch recalled. “The boy was sickened by the very idea.”

“Players are fickle things,” the Pillager leader grouched. “They hold no true loyalty unless it benefits them. Who’s to say that the goat boy’s guilt will not fade and he will decide he is superior to the Golden Child?”

“Actually,” the Evoker leader mused, “I have a suggestion on that front. The Piglins have a tradition of collaring their pets in gold and I’ve heard that they’ve done so to the Split Ender companion to the Golden Child. Why don’t we do the same to the goat child?”

Those at the table hummed in thought, muttering to themselves. The Ravagers that were summoned to be their beasts of burden were often marked with iron bindings and brands to keep them loyal. Perhaps it would be beneficial to have the goat child undergo a similar treatment. After all, while Ravagers were strong creatures that could easily trample the Pillagers to dust, they were seen only as animals and tools.

And the goat boy was to be the Golden Child’s shield.

“We do have some netherite that we took in our last raid of the Player Area,” Johnny recalled. “As far as I’m aware, we haven’t been able to agree on a use for it. We could use that for the goat child’s bindings, ensuring they cannot be broken or removed. Between us, I’m sure someone can manage a Curse of Binding.”

“I know of a village nearby with a powerful librarian,” the Evoker leader chimed in. “I’m certain they can be persuaded into parting with an enchanted book or two.”

“Perfect.” Johnny nodded in satisfaction, then his face grew grim. “Now, how much longer until we feel the goat boy is ready to be given to the Golden Child? The other Players are growing more and more unstable by the day. It is only a matter of time before one of the cruel ones discovers where the Golden Child is living. I would prefer him to have his shield before that happens.”

“The reports I’ve been hearing have suggested that the goat child is progressing well and is close to graduating,” the Pillager leader supplied. “I suspect it will not be long until he is ready.”

“The graduation ceremony...” the Evoker leader grimaced. “For our warriors, it is where they are granted their weapon and are allowed to wear their clan’s crest. What will we do for the goat child?”

“Give him the netherite bindings in place of the crest,” the Witch leader offered. “He will still need a weapon, but the bindings will make his place clear.”

“Then it sounds like we have a plan. Now let us turn our attention to the rest of the matters at hand so we can finish at present,” The Illusionist declared, turning their attention back to the map board. “The main force of the players is rapidly declining, as Johnny pointed out. They’re fracturing along internal lines, turning against one another instead of focusing on

combating us. Now is the perfect time to strike against them, and I know exactly who we should target."

With a wave of their hand, the Illusionist summoned a small image in the palm of his hand. The image of a player with black hair and a blue beanie on his head.

"We need to take down the Player known as Quackity."

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is Baba Yetu from Civ 4 in honour of my excitement for Civ 7.

Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Therapy and a surprise, a comfy cat convo, and an arctic barn meeting

Chapter Notes

As usual, shout-out to Author_of_Insanity101, my lovely co-author/beta. She, as usual, is the absolute best so give her all the love.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Anxiety curled in Tommy's stomach in a way that was fairly novel to him. Before...*Him*, Tommy would never have described himself as a nervous person, even if his family wished for him to be less bold and brave at points. Now, however, Tommy could feel himself almost constantly drowning in fear. Nerves deadened his tongue, stealing his speech in his throat. Frankly, he didn't know why anyone had even stuck around him as long as they had. That made it even harder to believe that someone, especially Captain Puffy herself, would go out of their way to visit him.

Still, the excitement of possibly seeing Puffy was enough for him to shove past the worst of his dread, managing to even get out of bed and leave the bunker for the first time in weeks. His head felt like it was on a swivel, some part of him utterly convinced that this was a trap. He clung tighter to Ranboo than ever before, desperate to know he wasn't alone.

The sun felt blinding from where it was reflecting off of the red sands, even though the sun was already beginning to sink below the surrounding hills. His eyes watered as he fought the instinct to narrow his eyes, not wanting to lose any of his vision.

"Tommy?" Ranboo called out to him, long arms curling around him. "Hey, you're spacing out again. Are you feeling okay?"

Tommy snapped his gaze back onto his Ender Hybrid friend, forcing himself to focus back onto the present.

"Fine," he managed, his voice only cracking slightly on the word. "Just... waiting for Puffy."

"Tommy... if you're not ready for this, no one is going to think less of you." Ranboo's words were soft, lacking any judgement or criticism. Even when the teen went looking for it, the

Enderman remained supportive and understanding. “We can postpone this as long as you need.”

“No,” Tommy said, heart pounding.

It was bad enough that Puffy was coming all the way out here for him, it would be even worse if he cancelled it so late. Suddenly, he startled a bit as Sam raised his hand slightly and pointed off in the distance before waving. Following Sam’s gesture, a spark of joy lit in him at the small rainbow-topped figure.

“Puffy!” he called out, waving happily.

“Hey Tommy!” Puffy greeted warmly as she emerged from the woods, walking up the path to the bench he and Ranboo were seated on. “Hi Ranboo. You both look like you’re doing well here.”

Tommy suddenly felt shy, maybe for the first time in his life. “Yeah,” he said before dropping his gaze down to his hands. Hands that were soon engulfed in Ranboo’s black and white ones.

“Tommy, is it okay if I speak for the both of us?” the Ender asked.

Tommy nodded, not trusting his voice at the moment. He also tightened his grip on Ranboo’s hands, holding them like they were his only tether to reality. Puffy made herself comfortable on the bench next to them, giving them plenty of space and letting Ranboo serve as a buffer between them. Part of him was grateful for the shield, but he also felt like he needed to hold the Enderman closer. (Why had he gotten so clingy lately?)

“I’m going to start with some simple questions. Please answer to the best of your ability.” A worn notebook materialised in Puffy’s lap, a pen in her hand. “Have either of you had any trouble in regards to food? Weak stomach, unable to eat, or feeling like you’re never full?”

“Tommy’s obsessed with golden foods,” Ranboo reported, Tommy curling into him and hiding his face. “He’s terrified of not having absorption and losing those extra buffs you get from eating them.”

Puffy nodded, writing in her notebook before glancing back at the pair. “And what about you, Ranboo? Are you eating well?”

“Yes, ma’am. I’ve been making sure to eat regularly and healthily. I was hoping it would encourage Tommy to do the same.”

Puffy chuckled lightly, smiling at Ranboo. “No need to call me ma’am, Puffy works just fine for me. Captain if you really want to be formal. Now, how’s your sleeping habits?”

Tommy cringed, already knowing the answer wouldn’t make Puffy happy. He felt his stomach twisting in knots at the thought of disappointing her. ~~(A voice in his head that sounded just like him always made him feel small when he messed up.)~~

“He’s been sleepwalking,” Ranboo explained, a grimace in his voice. “We sleep together so I’ve been trying to keep him in bed, but sometimes he gets out. He always heads for the river, but luckily the Drowned don’t let him get any further than ankle-deep.”

Puffy paused her writing, blinking in confusion before looking straight at Tommy. He cringed under her critical gaze, waiting for some sort of reprimand or insult.

“The Drowned... help you?”

Surprised, Tommy slowly came out of his flinch. That didn’t sound harsh or critical, just confused and maybe a little worried. Even after spending so much time with adults who never yelled or belittled him, he still wasn’t used to being treated so... gently. ~~(That same voice from before insisted he wasn’t worthy of it.)~~

“Y-yeah...” he answered softly. “Push me back to shore or whatever...”

“Tommy’s kind of been adopted by the mobs,” Ranboo elaborated, wrapping his long arms around Tommy and letting the boy lean on him. Tommy didn’t fight it, seeking the comfort of his friend’s grip. “All of them, even the hostile ones, will do everything to protect him.”

“Well, that explains the veritable army of mobs out in the woods,” a new voice commented.

Tommy froze, Ranboo tensed with a harsh snarl, and Puffy was on her feet in an instant. She put herself between the boys and this new voice, armour manifesting as a sword appeared in her hand.

“Oh fudge...” a second voice let out.

“Show yourselves!” Puffy commanded, Tommy unconsciously flinching at her loud and harsh tone. Only Ranboo’s tightened grip on him kept him from obeying out of habit. “Come out with your hands where I can see them!”

Badboyhalo stepped out of the tree line with his hands above his head. Next to him was Skeppy, who was similarly showing his hands. Neither of them had weapons or armour. Instead, both of them were carrying wicker baskets that were hanging on their raised arms.

“Sorry! Sorry! We didn’t mean to startle you!” Bad exclaimed, going so far as to push the hood of his cloak down so his glowing eyes were completely visible.

“We come in peace!” Skeppy promised. “We left our armour and weapons back home. I swear it!”

Part of Tommy wanted to relax because it was Badboyhalo, someone who had never done anything to hurt him, no matter how annoyed he got at the teen. However, she couldn’t help but remember how Skeppy had worked with *him*. How the diamond golem had taken one of his discs, taunting him with it. Besides, what if the pair blamed him for what Dream had done? Dream had been their friend before Tommy had even met the duo.

Before anyone could even begin to really deal with the situation or Tommy’s rising panic, a meow caught everyone’s attention. A small head popped above the rim of one of the wicker

baskets.

“*Ender*,” the cat let out a cheer.

“Enderchest?” Ranboo let out, sounding surprised. “Why do you guys have her?” He scowled at the two standing nearby.

Badboyhalo let out a nervous chuckle, moving slowly to rub the back of his neck in order to not startle Puffy. “Well, when we saw what had happened, we wanted to check in on you guys and bring you gifts.”

“Peace offerings!” Skeppy insisted. “And a sort of ‘Welcome to the Badlands’ gift.”

“But we wanted to give you both something, not just muffins. So we swang by your old place in L’Manberg, Ranboo, and found her hiding away in your place. Also, I think someone’s been in your place recently because the place was kind of ransacked.”

“What?” Ranboo let out, sounding worried. “Who?”

“Probably Quackity,” Puffy muttered bitterly, lowering her sword. “I don’t know what’s been going on with him, but he’s gone completely off the deep end. Every conversation with him seems to end in a fight.”

Tommy shuddered, cringing slightly. Quackity had been one of his best friends before all of this, someone he would get into so much trouble with. Still, everything that had happened made it clear to him that you never really could know someone.

“But enough of that, we have Enderchest here for you Ranboo, muffins for the pair of you, and Tommy, we have something we need to return to you.” Skeppy’s cheery tone turned serious by the end of his sentence. “Something we should have returned a *long* time ago.”

With slow movements, he reached into his inventory and summoned a disc, one that Tommy immediately recognized.

“Cat...”

“Yeah,” Skeppy said softly, letting Tommy take the disc. “I am so sorry I ever kept it. I should have returned it the moment Dream gave it to me.”

Tommy was silent, staring at the disc in his hand. The disc he’d given up on ever seeing again. To hold it once again... must less be *given it willingly*... It made him feel overwhelmed. Add the apology to it and it left the teen reeling.

Why was everyone apologising to him? First Wilbur, now Skeppy and Bad? Why? Wasn’t he the problem? With his loud voice and childish antics? Didn’t he deserve what happened to him? So why apologise... ~~why now?~~

“Th-thank you,” Tommy managed softly, feeling a tightness in his chest.

Enderchest felt the rumble deep in her chest. Being away from her old home had her nervous, but she couldn't deny that it was quieter here. There was no screaming, no one breaking things, and she had her Ender back! *Split-Black-White*, as the other Ender called him, had saved her as a kitten, bringing her into his home and telling her it was hers too.

She'd missed him when he'd left, but seeing him now, with the Golden Kitten, she realised it had been for the best. Curling on her Ender's lap, she reached her paws out and began to make biscuits out of the nearby blankets, not far away from the fluffy dog also on the bed.

The fluffy dog cracked open one eye to study Enderchest's paws but made no movement, which only served to encourage Enderchest's kneading.

"Do we sleep on softness like this every night?" she asked, enjoying the feeling of the blanket in her beans.

"Of course," the dog answered without hesitation. *"My Master believes in the comfortable things in life."*

"That's amazing! And your Master shares the softness with my Ender?"

"Your Ender belongs to the Golden Pup, so of course he shares all the comforts he can. He wants both of them to feel safe and wanted here, so much so that he is making them a den for them to have all to themselves."

"If it can be as soft as this place, the new cattery shall be pleasing." Enderchest's snout wrinkled a bit as she mewled bitterly. *"Though if I'm being honest, anything would be an improvement of my Ender's old home."*

That had Fran lifting her head, tilting it in confusion as she eyed her feline companion. *"Is that so? You seem happy with your Ender, so why was their old home such that you are happy to leave it?"*

"While my Ender was there, it was a suitable place to live. My only complaint would be a lack of things for me to sink my claws into." Enderchest stretched out her paws, letting her claws out briefly. She contemplated using them on the blanket, but didn't want to ruin her Ender's softness. *"No, once they departed to be with the Golden Kitten, the quality declined rapidly. It got loud and cold and there wasn't much food. Even when my Ender would go on their long walks, they always remembered to feed me. After they left, others came into my space and tore the place apart while also shouting. I hid as much as I could, but it no longer felt like my territory."*

"And that's why you let the demon and the gem golem take you?"

Enderchest nodded, purring happily as she glanced over at her two saviours. They were crouched in front of the Golden Kitten, offering him their warm treats with soft words and smiles.

"When the demon came, there was no shouting. They tried to fix what all the angry ones broke, and tried to make things clean again. When they found me in my hiding space, they

brought me food. They were gentle, just like my Ender was, and they promised to bring me to them."

"The demon and his shiny friend live nearby and drop by often, so you will see them again." Fran offered mildly, her tone suggesting she wasn't quite sure if she trusted them.

"As long as my Ender and his human don't mind their visits, then I shan't," Enderchest declared after some thought.

"You are young. You do not remember the cruelties they did unto the Golden Pup. The role they played in his torment." Fran sneezed, making her displeasure known. *"It will take time before I will consider them worthy of trust."*

"Perhaps." Enderchest yawned and stretched, making herself comfortable in her Ender's lap. *"But they seem like they're willing to put in the time."*

In the wake of *red-loud-gold's* departure from Technoblade's barn, *resident-spruce-quiet-arctic* had been waiting for the day where they could leave. They, along with many of the other inhabitants of the barn, longed to follow the beloved youngling to their new home, to offer protection and companionship. For the Enderman, they also wished to offer support to *split-black-white*.

The hybrid youngling knew so little of their heritage, held such little confidence in themselves, and yet still risked everything to aid *red-loud-gold*. It was no wonder they had been claimed by the child, granted the highest honour any Ender could hope to receive. They could only imagine how *split-black-white* would flourish under proper guidance.

And, they wanted to leave the arctic.

Of course, the enderman couldn't just leave without consulting the leader of Technoblade's animals. Even as a member of the Ender Council, they were beholden to the hierarchy of the barn they called home. It would be simply rude to leave without a discussion with the others, including who else would be wishing to come.

"Of course, I will be going!" Baba declared, snorting loudly as she stamped her paw. *"I have been away from my cub for far too long!"*

"Baba, be reasonable," Steve admonished, putting a paw on her back in an attempt to soothe her. *"The Creeper hybrid lives in a warm biome. We are not meant for such warmth."*

"That is MY cub!" She was almost roaring at this point. *"I refuse to abandon them like so many others have! He deserves to have a parental figure that does not fail him!"*

"Baba." Bob's tone stilled most of the air in the barn, with most of the animals turning to watch him. *"Do you think you can properly care for the Golden Cub in an environment you are ill equipped for? Do you want to subject the child to watching you suffer in the heat*

because of your stubbornness? Would the cub not feel guilty if you are hurting yourself for their sake?"

resident-spruce-quiet-arctic watched as those words hit Baba as she stumbled back. After a moment, she seemed to deflate before flopping onto the hay. Steve came and laid down next to his mate, putting a paw around her in comfort.

"While going now is not feasible, perhaps the Cub will visit. Or perhaps the Creeper will create a place for you to live so that you will not suffer in the heat." Bob offered his words as a comfort to the blow he had clearly dealt to the distressed polar bear.

"I suppose that means the foxes will be staying too," Carl spoke up, munching away on the carrots Technoblade had brought for him.

"The foxes, while they care for the child, owe their loyalty to Technoblade," Bob answered, giving the arctic foxes a sideways glance. The three were all perched along the railings of the barn, sitting with the crows and watching everyone below. *"It is the same with the Dog Army."*

"That is not what I see," *resident-spruce-quiet-arctic* chimed in, glancing outside at the snow-covered yard.

One by one, the various animals peeked through the doors and the barn windows, seeing all of the dogs gathered in an ominous circle. Growls filled the air as several stalked one another, their hackles raised before they pounced, barking and howling as they fought.

"What is this?" Baba questioned, stunned by what she was witnessing.

"A tournament," Carl answered, recognizing the scene for what it was. Likely, he had seen many such battles during his time as Technoblade's mount. *"Bob was correct when they said that the army owes their loyalty to Technoblade, but the Golden colt is part of their pack, and they would not so easily abandon him. They will duke it out to decide which among them gets to go."*

resident-spruce-quiet-arctic could see the merit in this approach. The dogs had done something similar to decide who would get to snuggle with the boy when he was still in the barn. Those fights had been much less serious, but now the stakes were higher. The winners would belong to *red-loud-gold* permanently and would be tasked with keeping him safe. So, only the strongest would be accepted.

"So it will just be me and the winners of their contest," the Enderman mused. *"A small group, but that would likely prove beneficial. Red-loud-gold likely does not have room for too many of us and we do not want to be a burden."*

"A-actually..." a nervous moo came from the rear of the barn. *"I... I'm coming too..."*

It was the newest addition to the barn, the mooshroom who had accompanied the Creeper Hybrid and the Masked One to the arctic. Mushroom Henry.

“Tommy... is my friend. I want to be with my friend. I’ll be going.” Slowly, their voice hardened, showing their determination on the matter.

“Of course,” Bob replied, gently nudging his fungal cousin with his snout. *“The child will be delighted to have you back. They have missed you.”*

Baba grumbled to herself from where she was sulking but said nothing else on the matter. *resident-spruce-quiet-arctic* took the opportunity to slip out of the barn. Ignoring the dogs and their tournament, they slipped over to the cabin the old crow and the undead bird now lived in. They peered through the window, watching the two sit in a nest while looking over old letters.

Once upon a time, they would have been sitting by the fire with them. They could still see their old boat nestled in the corner, as if waiting for them to return. However, they knew this wasn’t where they belonged. Not anymore.

Reaching for their neck, the Ender tugged lightly at the collar Technoblade had given them. A leather thing with emeralds on it and a nametag that read “Edward”. For a moment, they hesitated, then they reached around and undid the clasp.

Collaring was a high honour for Endermen who were chosen and uncollaring was a shameful affair. Still, *resident-spruce-quiet-arctic* knew that they could no longer remain as Edward, Techno’s claimed Ender. Their loyalty lay with *red-loud-gold* and *split-black-white* now. Thus, they let the collar slip from their claws, watching as it fell into the accumulated snow beneath the window.

Perhaps when they went to join the younglings, they would receive a new claim. They would likely be beneath *split-black-white*, but they would happily accept that. However, until that time came, they would make do without, for the first time in quite a while.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is Gone by Nothing More (The 10 year anniversary acoustic version specifically.)

Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

Who let the dogs out, Tubbo's new kicks, Quackity's attempted interrogation, and Punz's newfound vow of poverty (three for three on declining mental health)

Chapter Notes

As usual, shout-out to Author_of_Insanity101, my lovely co-author/beta. She, as usual, is the absolute best so give her all the love.

Tags have been slightly updated, but not massively.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Apollo sat surveilling his companions, his compatriots in arms. As the oldest of all of the ones who had earned their place to join up with the Golden Cub, he knew that it would fall upon him to marshall the pups and put them through their paces. After all, they were to be the Golden Pup's personal Dog Army. They could not falter in their duty.

The winners of the competition varied in both age and breed, with two of them even being littermates. This meant they'd be able to work together easily and would (hopefully) set a good example for the rest. Apollo was the eldest of them, being a Chestnut wolf straight from the taiga biome just beyond the arctic banks. From there, their pack had a gorgeous Rusty Wolf from a sparse jungle, the two light brown Woods wolves from the L'Manberg forests, an ashen wolf born and raised here in the arctic, and a uniquely spotted wolf from a distant savannah.

"Alright!" Apollo began, pacing in front of the five chosen pups. *"The six of us have risen to victory over our peers! Now, we must begin our grand pilgrimage to the land of the Players, to the side of our new Master!"*

The five victors howled in unison, their voices filling the sky.

"We will be his guardians, his Dog Army. That means we need to be ready and prepared for anything. I expect nothing short of your best when it comes to protecting our Master!"

More howls filled the sky. A creak caught Apollo's attention and turning his snout slightly to the right, over near the barn. There, he could see the Ender formerly known as Edward, along

with the Golden Pup's Mooshroom. Both were exiting the barn, making their way over to the gathered pups.

"So many..." the Mooshroom said quietly. He seemed to be a shy thing, quite skittish. *"Are all of you going to join Tommy?"*

"Yes." Apollo had inherited his former master's distaste for wasted words. *"The Golden Pup will need all the aid he can get if the rumours on the winds are to be believed."*

A nudge to his shoulder drew his attention to one of the pups, the one with the rusty coat, who looked at him curiously.

"What is the best way to get to the Golden Cub? If I remember correctly, there is an ocean between us and the rest of the players and we cannot travel by that means with the Ender with us?"

"Indeed," the Ender muttered, vwooping in concern. *"Plus Mushroom Henry cannot swim as well as you pups, and without a player, a boat would be difficult."*

"Easy!" the spotted pup barked excitedly. *"We will just take the Nether! No water there, and we'll get to our new Master that much quicker!"*

Apollo rumbled, impressed by the spotted pup's clever thinking. *"An excellent idea. Ender, will this plan suffice?"*

The Ender paused for a second, turning the idea over in their head for a second. *"Yes, it would be wonderful to get there as soon as possible. And I can ask my nether kin to aid us in crossing any lava pools the players have not connected. Mushroom Henry?"*

Everyone turned to the Mooshroom, who seemed to be shaking in his hooves. The mushrooms on its back almost seemed to be wilting.

"Will... will it be safe? I was told never to go into the nether..."

The Ender looked down at the Mooshroom and rested one clawed paw on his head. *"For us, it will be perfectly safe. The nether is not usually such a guaranteed thing and if it was red-loud-gold who warned you, they were right. However, because we belong to red-loud-gold, we will be able to pass through."*

"Promise?"

One of the woods wolf siblings made their way over to the Mooshroom, rubbing against their leg. *"We'll keep you safe. You're our Master's precious Mooshroom. Nothing will happen to you."*

Seemingly comforted by the young pup's assurances, the Mooshroom straightened up. *"O-Okay... Let's do it."*

Apollo grinned, then barked once to gain everyone's attention. The pups got into formation around the two other creatures, something drilled into them during their training under their

former master.

“Dog army! Forward... MARCH!”

Tubbo scooped up a handful of water from the large basin set up near the training area, splashing it over his face. The savannah biome was always hot and dry, and the daily training always left the goat hybrid feeling sweaty and sore. Still, he couldn't deny that he was undergoing some positive changes.

Looking at himself in the reflection of the water basin, Tubbo almost didn't recognize himself. He'd always been scrawny and small for his age, something he'd been mercilessly teased about for as long as he could remember. However, now he had visibly filled out, his body tanned and toned from the constant training. Even his horns had grown a bit, beginning to curl out of where they poked through his hair.

Perhaps the most noticeable change was in how Tubbo felt physically. He knew he was stronger, not to mention he could go longer in his training with each passing day. And, with the consistent meals and a stable sleep schedule, he felt... healthy. ~~(How long had it been since he could claim that?)~~

A loud noise from behind him snapped Tubbo from his reverie. He looked up to see a pair of Vindicators standing before him. In almost perfect sync, they growled and waved their hands in a clear command to follow them. Immediately, Tubbo stepped into place between them, allowing himself to be escorted.

During his stay as a Pillager prisoner, Tubbo had seen pretty much the entire camp. Even with his training, he was still taken on his “walks”, likely so he could get some fresh air and exercise outside of the arena. As such, he recognized the path leading to the camp's smithy.

Passively, he wondered why he was being taken to the smithy, but he didn't allow that to concern him. Whatever the Pillagers wanted from him, he would give it. After all, he was a shield. A weapon. Nothing more than a tool.

The smith looked up as Tubbo was escorted in, eying him a bit before gesturing to a simple, wooden stool. He took the offered seat, then felt his two escorts place their hands on his shoulders. Their grip was firm, almost like restraints. If this were training, Tubbo would have used the various moves he had been taught to break free. However, he just took a breath and braced himself, curious as to why he was being restrained.

The smith reached over and grabbed his left arm, holding it up and taking some string and measuring it around his wrist. Tugging the string tight, the smith tied the string around Tubbo's wrist and cut the ends short before untying it. Setting that piece aside, the smith repeated the procedure to his right wrist. After seeming satisfied with what they'd found, attention was directed to Tubbo's ankles. The process was repeated there, both on the left and right ankle. Finally, the smith brought the rest of the string up to Tubbo's neck, wrapping it snugly but not enough to impair his airflow.

Tubbo's breath hitched slightly, but not from the string. It finally dawned on him what was going on. He was being measured, likely for some very specific accessories. His eyes darted over to the nearby Ravager pens, seeing the thick bands of metal wrapped around their limbs and horns. Like him, they were tools and weapons, and their bands marked them as such.

Swallowing hard, Tubbo felt the grip of his captors tightening. Likely they had been restraining him for this very reason. They didn't want him to fight them or try to run off. And perhaps, if things had been different, he would have tried. But... Why would he run?

In the weeks, closing in on months since his capture, no one had come for him. No one was looking for him, and likely no one even cared that he was missing. ~~He didn't think about the fact that he had driven away the one person who would have.~~ Here, he had the chance to finally do something right. Here, he may be little more than a tool they were honing for another, but he'd never been healthier or stronger.

Here he could finally redeem himself and do what he should have done a long time ago.

As the string around his neck pulled away, Tubbo took a deep breath and relaxed. Whatever the Pillagers chose to do, he would accept it. Choices were out of his hands now, which given his presidency, might have been for the best. Let someone else decide for him. He would simply do as he was told, serving as a faithful and loyal shield. Just like he deserved.

Yes, he was much better suited for being an unthinking, obedient tool.

L'Manberg was going to the dogs and Quackity hated it. After Schlatt's presidency, then Tubbo's farce in office, the duck hybrid was losing any and all respect for his fellow players. They were idiots. Disloyal, scheming idiots.

Everywhere he looked, there was someone glaring at him. Judging him. Whispering when they thought he couldn't hear. But he could. He always heard them. He knew what they thought of him, but he didn't care. They were the ones who did this. They were the ones who ruined everything. They were all traitors! Useless traitors!!

He couldn't stand to look at them anymore. To hear them whining and complaining.

"You're acting crazy, Quackity."

"You can't accuse everyone you see, Quackity."

"Quackity, maybe you should take some time off."

"I don't want to work with someone as unstable as you, Quackity."

Screw them all! He didn't need them! He didn't need anyone! He was going to do everything himself! Starting with finding Dream's mole.

Puffy had disappeared not long after Tubbo, then everyone else had split off. They didn't care about what was going on anymore. They'd given up on the hunt! But not him. Not Quackity. He had a clue, a lead on one person who had been conspicuously absent this entire time. Someone whose loyalty lay with the highest bidder.

Punz.

He knew better than to try and recruit anyone else. They'd shown where their loyalties lie, and he refused to be backstabbed again. So, geared up in his Butcher Army outfit, Quackity prepared to storm Punz's tower.

Surprisingly, it looked like someone had beaten him to it. The door was broken down, there were chests everywhere with items scattered across the floor, and an ominous chair covered in chains and blood. Lots of blood.

It stained the entire space, having long since dried in place, with no attempt made to clean it. The chains looked to be still locked in place, as if the person bound to the chair hadn't been released, but had been forced to respawn.

A Canon Death... and not a kind one.

"Punz!" Quackity shouted, kicking over the bloody chair while brandishing his axe. "Show yourself, you spineless coward!!"

A snort sounded behind him, causing Quackity to whip around. From the staircase leading up, a man descended. For a moment, the duck avian didn't recognize him. That is, until he saw the familiar golden pendant hanging around the man's neck.

"Punz?" Quackity lowered his axe in shock. "What the fuck happened to you?"

To say Punz looked rough would be an understatement. His normally white hoodie was almost grey with dirt and dust, with his left sleeve just gone. No... not just the sleeve... his whole arm. It was just a ragged, bloody stump that had scarred badly. He was gaunt, pale, his hair was greasy, he had a five o'clock shadow across his face, and the bags under his eyes were so dark they looked like bruises.

"I died," the (former?) merc snarled, summoning what looked to be an awkward potion from his inventory before downing the whole thing. When he threw the bottle aside, Quackity flinched as it shattered. "Now get lost."

Quackity lifted his axe back up, shock fading into the back of his mind. "Not until you tell me what you know about where Dream is."

Punz rolled his eyes, summoning a fresh potion before ripping the cork out with his teeth. He spat it out, then went and plopped down on a torn couch.

"Funny, that's what cost me my arm to the last guy." He took a hearty swig of the potion. "I'll tell you what I told them: I don't know. I lost touch with him in the Nether and haven't heard from him since."

"Bullshit!" Quackity slammed the axe into the couch, grinning when Punz flinched at the blow. *Prime*, it felt good to be the one on this side of the intimidation. "I know someone is feeding him information! How else has he avoided capture this long?! So stop lying and confess!!"

Punz let out a long breath, then looked Quackity straight in the eye. Their gaze remained locked for a good minute, the duck hybrid growing more and more uncomfortable. Eventually, he was forced to look away, which made the one-armed mercenary smirk.

“You know... that look in your eye. That hunger for power, that willingness to do whatever it takes to get what you want... it reminds me of someone.” That smirk grew wider. “All you’re missing is a mask.”

Quackity snarled at the implication. He was not like Dream, he was a far better person than Dream. What Punz was saying was just baseless words to get under his skin. He was the good guy! The hero of this story! He was going to save the server by destroying that worthless, disgusting monster!

“Tell me where he is...” Quackity tightened his grip on his axe, “or I’ll-”

“You’ll what? Kill me?” Punz snorted hard, downing the rest of the bottle before throwing it away. He then got back up, taking a step toward Quackity. The duck hybrid stepped back, the hairs on the back of his neck raising. “Been there, done that, got the missing limb to prove it. Besides, you don’t have the guts.”

“Shut up...”

“You’re trying to play it tough, but I see right through this bravado bullshit of yours.” Another step forward for Punz, another step back for Quackity. “Always in the shadow of bigger men, always striving to stand on your own but always faltering. The closest you could get to power was as Schlatt’s *Vice*.”

“Shut up!” He hated that word. *Vice*... An assistant with barely any power to call their own. He was no one’s Vice!

“You knew you couldn’t beat Wilbur on your own, so you cozied yourself up to that old drunk.” Another step and Quackity could smell the potion on Punz’s breath. ~~(He hated how just the smell made him want to curl up and cry.)~~ “Even when you rebelled against him, you just rode on Wilbur’s coat tails throughout the civil war. And even now, you’re struggling in vain to grasp at power, but all you can do is emulate the *truly* powerful Players.”

“Shut UP!!”

Quackity swung his axe. He should have hit. Punz was *right there*! He should have cleaved the man in two! He didn’t even have both arms to defend himself! But as he opened his eyes. Punz’s remaining arm had easily caught the axe, wrenching it from the duck hybrid’s hands.

“Face it, Quackity. You’re a follower. A pawn. A walking second-place medal. Even if by some miracle you managed to find Dream, it wouldn’t change anything. You’ll fade into the background like you always do, unwanted and unneeded.” Punz threw the axe aside, sneering at the duck hybrid with undisguised contempt. “Now get the fuck out of my tower.”

Quackity, now sans axe, felt utter terror run down his spine. He turned away and bolted out of the tower, wanting to put as much distance between him and that one-armed drunk.

Punz snorted in amusement as Quackity fled like the coward he was. His little display had been pathetic, especially after Sam and Ponk's interrogation. Those two knew how to inspire compliance and following through on their implied violence. Sure, it cost him an arm, but he did, darkly, admire them for committing.

Picking up the fallen axe, Punz tossed it into one of the looted chests, then summoned a fresh bottle of awkward potion. With any luck, Quackity would be the last Player he would have to deal with for a while. He was sick and tired of drama and fighting, and he had nothing left to offer them. No, he was done with this server and their nonsense and he would be keeping well away from it all, no matter what the pay was.

Downing the bottle, Punz let out a groan as he flopped onto his couch. His eyes fluttered closed and he slipped into a drunken stupor.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is Cheating With You by The Correspondents.

Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

A nice day to move, a pleasant conversation, and a reframing

Chapter Notes

As usual, shout-out to Author_of_Insanity101, my lovely co-author/beta. She, as usual, is the absolute best so give her all the love.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The four residents of Sam's bunker gathered out on the large hill just outside, admiring the creeper hybrid's latest build. It was a large, cobblestone tower with several stories and an open roof, perfect for stargazing or just enjoying the scenery. The mix of Deepslate and normal cobble allowed for some beautiful contrast, especially with moss and vines adding colour to the normally grey blocks. Spruce wood accents also aided in giving the tower a more homey finish, and the abundance of flowers were the cherry on top. The entire structure felt welcoming, a novel experience on this server.

Ranboo was thrilled by the creation, absolutely loving how spacious it was. He happily stepped through the double door entrance with Tommy on his arm, feeling soft mossy carpet beneath his feet. The bottom floor consisted of a cozy kitchen and a comfortable sitting area, complete with a modest dining set and comfortable chairs. There was even a large couch tucked under a window, allowing for a beautiful view.

A staircase spiralled up to the second story against the wall, which turned out to be a library. Bookshelves lined the walls with small alcoves to sit and read in. A jukebox was tucked amongst the books with an ender chest right next to it. More mossy carpet lined the spruce floors, a nice touch that had Ranboo *vwooping* with joy.

Another floor up was their room, with something closer to a nest of blankets and pillows on a mattress on a raised platform rather than a traditional bed. It could easily seat three people, meaning that it would be perfect for when Tommy needed any animal support for nightmares. There was a small wardrobe for them to use for their clothes, with small chests with their names on them for personal use. Shelves were attached to the wall, perfect for personal decorations.

Finally, there was the roof. It was big and open, with a conical point that provided ample shade. It offered an amazing view of the entire area, and there was even a bench with a few

planter boxes. There were already some alliums planted in them, which had Ranboo smiling happily.

“Well?” Sam asked as the tour came to an end. “What do you two think?”

Tommy was quiet, leaning on the edge of the tower as he looked out over the horizon. The wind swept across them all, carrying with it the refreshing smell of wild flowers and moss. Feeling it through his hair, Ranboo couldn’t help but churr, relaxing visibly.

“I think it’s absolutely perfect,” Ranboo spoke up, glancing over at his companion. “What do you think, Tommy?”

“I...” Tommy’s breath hitched. “Is it... really okay for us to be here? To... have all this?”

Sam smiled cheerfully, not showing even a hint of the upset that Ranboo was sure that Tommy's doubt had cause. “Of course. Ponk supplied the flowers, thankfully, because I have a bit of a black thumb. Everything else, I found lying about or it was dropped off for me to work with.”

Ponk jerked their thumb towards Sam and leaned forward before loudly whispering in a conspiratorial manner. “He needed a project before he got so bored as to rework the redstone for his lighting system. The enrichment is good for him.”

Tommy let out a chuckle, a noise that surprised everyone, though Ranboo appreciated how quickly Sam and Ponk schooled their expressions. He was grateful that Tommy wasn't looking at him so that he could keep his involuntary smile for longer.

“Well, if he’s that desperate for something to do, I guess we can make do.” The teen’s eyes drifted to the expanse of land below. “What’s gonna go in that big fenced off area? Some big redstone farm or whatever?”

“Actually,” Sam spoke up, pointing out toward the open barn that was currently under construction, “that’s going to be a grazing area for the animals that are bound to flock here. They deserve their own space and it was easy enough to add on to the whole thing.”

“Really?” Tommy looked out at the large piece of land. “It’s a bit big though... do you really think I’ll need this much space?”

“Tommy...” Ranboo shook his head, now having a good reason for his smile. “If anything, it won't be big *enough*.”

Fran let out a bark of agreement, and from the look Tommy was giving the dog, she was agreeing with the Ender. Ranboo watched as Tommy raised his gaze back to the field.

“Mushroom Henry would love it here,” he said wistfully, a soft smile on his face. “And Bob. Bob was a nice cow. And Baba. What ever happened to them all? Did they stay in that strange animal place?”

“For now,” Ponk answered, leaning against the tower edge. “Knowing how much these animals love you, I wouldn't be surprised if they show up sometime soon.”

burning-nylium-warped wandered through their Bastion home, happily carrying a block of warped wart. It had been a gift from their Master, a powerful brute that was well respected among the Piglins. They had taken to carrying it everywhere, a reminder of how lucky they were to have such a kind and caring owner. The weight was comforting in their paws.

Out of the corner of their eye, they spotted a white dot, an unnatural colour in the nether. That caught their attention and they clutched their warped wart closer to them before teleporting closer to get a better look. *Technically*, they weren't allowed to leave the Bastion because of their clumsiness, but their Master would like to know if there were intruders nearby. Besides, their Master had often forgiven mistakes made in their curiosity

Upon appearing in a cloud of purple particles, the white blob became more clearly an example of what *burning-nylium-warped* thought players referred to as a "dog." And this "dog" was not alone, being trailed by 5 other such creatures, each a different colour from the rest. With these "dogs" was a walking wart creature, with stalks that almost looked like crimson stems, but duller and with white on them. Finally, there was a fellow Ender. And not just any Ender, an *elder*.

The elder had no collar on, but the traces of one that had once been worn could be seen around their neck. The way their fur was darker, like it hadn't seen the sun or light in a long time. But... Why would an elder remove their collar? Why would they renounce the one who chose them? It made no sense. Still, *burning-nylium-warped* was excited to see an elder and didn't let their concerns about the lack of collar stop their excitement.

"*Elder!*" they called out, teleporting onto the player bridge the group was crossing. "*Elder! Welcome!*"

The elder looked at them and chirped a hello. The dogs and the wart creature eyed them curiously, but did not seem hostile. If anything, the wart creature looked quite timid.

"*Why are you here? What are all these other creatures? Where's your collar?*"

The elder shifted, gaze drifting further away from them, towards the lava not far off, clearly uncomfortable in the face of their eager questions. Still, they didn't let that stop them from answering in a level tone.

"*We are just passing through on our way to our new home. This was the easiest path to take there.*"

"*New home? You are leaving blood-axe-pig? Did he take your collar from you?*" Surely that wasn't the case. Having a player renounce those they nametagged was unheard of! Once you were claimed, you were theirs until the day their game ended for good.

"*No, we have decided to leave blood-axe-pig in order to go to our new home. My companion here-*" they patted the wart creature on its flank "*-belongs to the Golden Youngling, and these young pups were chosen to be his protectors. As for myself, I am hoping to offer my assistance to Split-Black-White, the Player Ender the Golden Youngling has claimed.*"

The wart creature snorted slightly and pressed into the elder's leg slightly harder. *burning-nylium-warped* stared slightly harder at the strange creature, both curious about the unusual beast and stressed about the elder's response. It was a noble response but still, the thought of giving up their collar for anything, even with the possibility, near certainty of another collar, was giving them a mix of horror and terror. Maybe that was the difference between themselves and an elder, the ability to tolerate that level of challenge.

"Split-Black-White and I had a chat when they and the Golden Youngling were in my bastion. I hope they're both feeling fully better after what the Green Monster did to them."

burning-nylium-warped winced at the amount of eyes they could feel had aimed at them, but did not allow for the discomfort to drive them off.

"We were aware of what happened to the Golden Youngling but did the Green Monster harm Split-Black-White, aside from whatever caused them to come to spend time in your bastion?" The elder asked peacefully but *burning-nylium-warped* had lived in a bastion long enough to recognize danger when it stood in front of them.

"Black magic was involved, making Split-Black-White act not like themselves. A mark on their neck was found and removed, though not without harming the young hybrid. When they first learned about it, they were very upset and scared for the Golden Youngling. They were subdued and did not remember when they woke up. I thought it best to let it remain forgotten."

A low rumble began to emerge from the elder and *burning-nylium-warped* felt their hackles raise, even as they could tell that the rage was not aimed at them. Still, they cowered on instinct, lowering their head and trying to look small.

"I-If it helps, my Master is ensuring that the Green Monster cannot do anything like that again. They are very powerful and respected in the Bastion."

The elder seemed somewhat mollified by that information but was still shaking in rage. The strange wart creature leaned harder against the elder, clearly trying to comfort them. The elder's paws tightened and relaxed repeatedly in the red fur as the elder tried to calm their temper.

Finally, after a few minutes, the elder managed to relax enough to turn their attention back to the conversation.

"It does ease my concerns somewhat, though it also makes the urgency of our exodus that much clearer. If this is your Bastion, then perhaps you can direct us to the portal Red-Loud-Gold travelled through when they returned to the Overworld."

burning-nylium-warped perked back up at the chance to help the elder out, especially when it would benefit the Golden Youngling and *Split-Black-White*. Directing the group to the portal was easy as they knew which portal was located, not far away on the other side of the Bastion. Turning around, they jumped a short distance away before pausing so that the non-ender members of the elder's party could catch up. This pattern repeated several times as the group slowly made their way further across the Nether.

“Just through here, Elder,” they declared, patting the portal. *“My Master and the rest of the Bastion have been making sure no Player can use it. But you should be okay!”*

“Thank you, young one.” The Elder gently rubbed the top of *burning-nylium-warped’s* head. *“May your Master be kind to you.”*

Fireaxe brought his hoof down on the back of the Green Monster’s skull, forcing its face into the netherrack. It cried out in pain, attempting to lift its head before Fireaxe pushed down harder.

“Chattel stay down,” he snarled, grinding his hoof.

The brutes of the Bastion had decided that the Green Monster was not properly repenting for its sins. Warpedsword and Scarredmace, the two Brutes assigned to guard it at night, reported how it would whisper to itself, promising pain and suffering to the Bastion. But worst of all, they reported how it seemed to curse the Golden Runt the most. The things the Green Monster declared it would do when it thought none were listening were utterly vile.

So, it was decided that the green monster needed to break. That was where Fireaxe came in.

Fireaxe was one of the most powerful brutes of the Bastion, second only to their leader in strength and cunning. His expertise came with dealing with Players, having taken many heads during his time. His iconic axe was actually a spoil of war, a netherite, enchanted axe taken from a player he slew. And it was that axe he now aimed at the Green Monster, letting the enchanted flames lick at its cheek.

“Stop!” it cried, attempting to wriggle free. “Stop please!”

“Chattel stay down,” he repeated, grinding his hoof a second time for emphasis.

“I’m staying down! I’m staying down!”

Fireaxe removed their hoof and the monster stayed down. It was shaking and sobbing, just like the Golden Cub had been when the Bastion had saved him from this disgusting beast. The reminder of that scene hardened the Brute’s resolve and he tightened his grip on his weapon. He needed to make sure that nothing like that could ever happen again. He needed to break the green monster.

And he knew just where to start.

“Name!” he demanded, making the monster flinch.

“N-name?”

“Yours,” he snorted.

“Uh... um... it’s Drea-”

Fireaxe brought the hilt of his axe down on the creature's head, cutting it off before it could finish speaking. "Wrong! Chattel!"

The monster cowered further before Fireaxe, an action that stirred nothing within him. Cowering was not a thing that brutes did but this was no brute, this before him was a monster. A monster that did not understand their place in the world.

"Name!" he snapped again.

The monster flinched but something had clearly clicked in their head as they pointed to themselves and said "Chattel."

"Good." He was making progress, but he was far from done. The monster was only just starting to break, or perhaps it was just saying what it needed to say to avoid pain. He needed to make sure it knew its place. "Chattel is Runt Defiler!"

"Wh... wha-?"

Fireaxe brought his hoof down again, this time aiming for the monster's hand. There was a satisfying crunch and the monster screamed. Likely something was broken, not that it mattered. It wouldn't die from a broken hand.

"Chattel. Is. Runt. Defiler." Fireaxe emphasised every word, trying to get the message through the monster's thick skull.

"I- I don't..." Fireaxe ground his hoof into the broken hand, making the monster scream. "AUGH! I DON'T UNDERSTAND!! Please, STOP!!"

"Stop?" Fireaxe stepped back, grabbing Chattel by its chains and forcing them up. "Did Chattel stop when Golden Runt begged? Did Chattel stop when Golden Runt cried? No, Chattel did not, so Fireaxe will not."

He dropped the monster to the ground, drawing his axe properly. This time, rather than using the hilt, he pressed the edge against the monster's mangled hand. Of course, it tried to pull away, but he easily stomped on it again, pinning it in place.

"Chattel is Runt Defiler," he prompted, letting the heat of his axe make his threat clear.

The monster whimpered, steam rising from their cheeks. "Cha-ttel...is run-t...defi-ler."

Fireaxe snorted in acceptance, though slightly tempted to press the issue and make the monster repeat the phrase until they said it with belief, he knew that the process was a long journey, not a quick jump.

Although... perhaps a few dozen more repetitions would help.

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is A Night Like This by Caro Emerald

Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

New and old friends, family therapy, and travels

Chapter Notes

As usual, shout-out to Author_of_Insanity101, my lovely co-author/beta. She, as usual, is the absolute best so give her all the love.

I have bounced across the country over the past two weeks so that was fun.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy was sitting in the dining area of Bigman Tower, the home Sam had made for him and Ranboo. Enderchest was sitting in his lap, purring like a motor while he scratched behind her ear. In the kitchen, Ranboo was making them both some lunch, the smell of mushroom stew filling the tower with a tantalising smell.

“Got any plans for the rest of the day, Tommy?” the Ender prompted, likely on Puffy’s advice. After their last session, she’d suggested having the two of them try to do something to stay active. “I was thinking I’d like to work on some of the flower gardens around the tower base.”

Tommy hummed as he tilted his head slightly, making sure it was loud enough that Ranboo knew he was listening.

“I think Ponk found some sunflowers like you wanted. You could help me plant them,” Ranboo offered, clearly trying to sway Tommy’s decision.

Tommy finally nodded before pausing, having realised that Ranboo couldn’t see him.

“Yeah,” he managed, voice weak. Even from his seat, he could see the way that Ranboo’s face brightened, which only filled him with guilt. Of course, he pushed it down ferociously. Why did Ranboo always look so *happy* when he agreed with his plans?

“Great!” The Ender doled out two bowls of stew, carrying them over to the table before placing one in front of Tommy. “I added some Golden Carrot slices to the broth this time so you’ll have some golden food in your system. It’s not the same as Golden Apples, but you need some variety to your diet.”

“Thanks,” he said softly, staring at the stew.

The bowl was the same size as Ranboo’s, right down to the number of mushrooms and carrot slices bobbing in it. In the beginning, Tommy had been given bigger portions, but he knew he didn’t deserve them. He always switched his plate with Ranboo’s, knowing the Enderman deserved it more. That had lasted a single meal before Ranboo made sure they both ate equally. And to top it all off...

“Remember, I eat what you eat.” Meaning that Ranboo would only eat as much as Tommy did.

And Tommy knew that he was serious about that, having once only managed a few bites of a meal and had to watch Ranboo mirror his consumption. The guilt he’d felt from listening to the Ender’s stomach growl had gnawed at him for days. So he steeled himself and lifted the spoon to the bowl.

However, before he could take a single bite, there was a loud bell toll. Ranboo tensed, Enderchest froze, and Tommy felt cold dread fill his chest. The bell was an alarm system Sam had set up around the perimeter of his home, which included the Nether Portal. Those who had permission to come and go had special passes that would make the bell softer, like a welcome chime rather than an alarm.

The fact that it was as loud as it was meant their visitors were not welcome... and there were a lot of them.

Tommy dropped his spoon into the bowl and accidentally knocked the cat off of his lap and sprinted for the stairs, hoping to end up on the roof in order to get a better vantage point over who was coming. A startled *vwoop* and a shifting sound later and Ranboo was hot on his heels. They climbed the spiral stairs to the roof, taking cover amongst the battlements.

“Who could it be?” Tommy whimpered, terrified that it might be Punz or... or *him*... “Why are they here?”

Ranboo peeked out over the battlement, squinting into the morning rays. Then, his eyes widened and all the tension in his body relaxed.

“It’s not Players, Tommy.” There was visible relief in his words and tone. “It’s friends. One I think you’ll be happy to see.”

With that encouragement, Tommy managed to poke his head over the edge and spotted several familiar forms, including-

“Mushroom Henry!” Tommy shouted before turning and sprinting back down the stairs, moving as fast as he could to get to his friend.

Clattering down the stairs, he could feel the joy burning across his face as his rusty facial muscles got a workout from how hard he was smiling. Mushroom Henry was here! His precious mooshroom was here! He threw open the doors of the tower, vaulting over the fence

and heading straight for the animals. When he reached them, he threw his arms around Mushroom Henry's neck, hugging him tightly.

The mooshroom headbutted his chest lightly, which only made Tommy's heart soar higher.

"Hello," a soft voice said from his feet, breaking him out of his reverie and making him look down. It was a spotted puppy, one giving him the biggest doggy grin ever. *"We're your new dog army."*

"You are adorable. What's your name?" Tommy responded, crouching down while keeping one hand on Mushroom Henry in order to get a better look at the dog at his feet.

"Oh, we don't have names. Only Apollo does."

"Apollo? We?"

That's when Tommy finally noticed the five other dogs that were now sitting around him. Each of them was panting and smiling, looking up at him as if he was holding a bone. One of them looked slightly more serious than the others, scarring across their muzzle. That, Tommy could guess, was Apollo, his brother's naming convention shining through.

"Hello Apollo," he greeted, scratching behind the older dog's ear. "I'll admit, I didn't expect my own Dog Army."

Ranboo cleared his throat, alerting Tommy to his presence. "I'm less surprised, really. I remember how much time the dogs spent on or next to you in the barn."

Tommy had some vague memories of being buried in a sea of fur, but not much in the ways of specifics.

"These young pups worked hard to be chosen, Red-Loud-Gold," the Enderman that had accompanied the strange herd spoke up. *"They are eager to serve you and to be granted a name by you. An honour... I too hope to receive."*

For some reason, Ranboo let out a very startled chirp at the Ender's declaration. Tommy eyed his friend, both confused and worried. After a minute, when it became clear that Ranboo was not going to answer, he slowly shifted his eyes back to the Ender to see if he could puzzle out what had distressed Ranboo.

"Um... why are you stressing out my friend?" He internally winced at his accusatory tone, but he couldn't afford to wither. Ranboo was important to him and he didn't like it when his friend was upset. "There something about me naming you that's so important?"

Ranboo lightly rested his paw on Tommy's shoulder but stayed silent. The teen looked back at his friend, then returned his gaze to the Enderman before him.

"Right... well, uh..." His eyes darted around, searching for inspiration. And then, his eyes fell on the allium flowers Ranboo had planted not too long ago. "How about Allium? Ranboo likes them and you two seem to know each other so..."

The ender, Allium, chirped in agreement, pleasure coating the sound. Ranboo's hand didn't move but his grip loosened and Tommy was pleased to see his posture relax with his suggestion.

"Our turn, our turn!" Two of the puppies, one ashen coloured and the other rusty, danced around Tommy's legs, causing him to laugh. Two of the other pups sat beside Apollo, tails wagging at great speed while the third, the first to speak to him, had sat down beside Mushroom Henry.

"Hello there." He reached out one hand from where it hung by his side and placed it on the ashen pup. "You look like cobblestone, so you'll be Cobble, a mighty name for a mighty dog."

Cobble yipped in excitement. *"Thank, thank, thank you!"* And with that, he darted back to Apollo's side, leaving the rusty pup shaking in anticipation in front of Tommy.

The rusty pup managed to stay still for only a second more before something caught her attention. Nose twitching, she broke forward and ran forward, twisting around Tommy and jumping onto Ranboo, who squawked and shoved her nose into his pocket and pulled back with her prize in her mouth, a golden apple.

"Apple," Tommy snorted, amused at how disgruntled Ranboo looked at the theft.

The pup dropped the gapple onto the ground and grinned at him. *"I like it! Apple it is!"* With that, she bit the gapple again and trotted off, leaving a small distance between herself and the other dogs.

Tommy hadn't meant for her to be named Apple, but one act of theft clearly wasn't enough as she took the name to be hers. With Apple having left, the two woods pups walked up, much calmer than both Cobble and Apple.

"Hi, it's wonderful to be here. We're littermates." The one with honey eyes spoke first, sitting herself carefully down.

"It's so pretty here." Her sister with lighter eyes, almost the same shade as a dandelion, stood beside her sister.

"Good sightlines and good defences," the honey-eyed one spoke, glancing around the Badlands and looking up at the tower.

Tommy rocked back on his heels, pondering what to call the pair of siblings. After a moment of contemplation, he began to pet the one with honey eyes. "I think I'll name you Clementine, and your sister... How does Clara sound?"

"I like Clementine," the wolf declared.

"And I like Clara," her sister agreed. *"Thank you so much for the wonderful names, Master."*

Finally, he turned to the last unnamed dog, the one sitting beside Mushroom Henry, knowing that there was only one name suitable for him. Leaning forward, he rested his hand on the top

of the spotted dog.

“And you, I dub you Dog Henry.”

Dog Henry immediately began barking, wagging his tail happily as he licked Tommy’s face. The teen couldn’t help but laugh, feeling the warmth and affection of his new doggy friends. The rest of the pack came in and joined the love fest, smothering the teen in an avalanche of fur and softness.

The cold had long sunk into her bones before Puffy made it to the coordinates she had been messaged. She had fully intended to delete the message, rather unwilling to devote her energies elsewhere when Tommy and Ranboo needed so much of her care. However, the sender caught her eye and she had hesitated, knowing how important Wilbur had been to Tommy. Plus, she’d seen the determination in his eyes, how even freshly resurrected and overwhelmed, his thoughts had been about Tommy.

Thus, she found herself having trekked through the arctic in order to come out and help Wilbur rebuild his mental health.

The cabin in front of her was very cute, with even the smoke billowing out of the chimney looking picturesque. To think that the three most dangerous Players on the server lived here... But then again, it made sense. Techno wanted to be left alone, Phil was Techno’s best friend, and Wilbur was Phil’s son.

However, Puffy had long since decided on her way up that she was not scared of them, that she could not be scared of them, no matter how dangerous they could be, no matter their protective instincts over one another. Her fear would not be helpful and could even negatively impact Wilbur’s recovery.

Starting up the stairs, she glanced through the windows on the front of the house in order to get a sense of what she should expect when she gets inside.

The living room was lit up by a roaring fireplace, showing all three residents within. Technoblade was pacing across the room while Wilbur sat in a chair, hiding his face in his hands. Philza was idly stoking the fire, glaring at the glowing embers as if they had offended him. Clearly, she would be walking into a fun situation.

“Hello?” she called out, tentatively knocking on the door. “It’s Puffy. I’m here for Wilbur’s therapy?”

A series of footsteps were the only response before the door swung open and she found Technoblade looking back at her, stress in his eyes.

“Hope you’re ready to upgrade it to family therapy,” he muttered, his voice laced with exhaustion and bitterness. “Things are... well, you’ll see.”

That statement did not fill Puffy with hope, instead triggering the opposite reaction, dread. Still, she was professional enough to not let it show, recentering herself in a heartbeat. As lightheartedly as she could manage, she smiled at Technoblade. “What prompted this change?”

“Phil,” Technoblade grunted, before finally moving out of the doorway and allowing her inside.

Inside, she found herself stared at by a bitter Phil and a distraught Wilbur, while Technoblade shut the door behind her. Puffy turned her focus onto Wilbur, making it clear that she was speaking to him and him alone, no matter the others in the room.

“I’m glad to see you’re doing better, physically at the very least. Now, as the person who asked for therapy, I’m going to ask you how you want this to go. Do you want to do family therapy or the individual therapy that was the original plan?”

Wilbur let out a sigh so great that he sagged with the force of it. “Could today be a family therapy session and other sessions later be individual? I think that this situation has to be handled as soon as possible, as it’s not exactly helping anything.”

Puffy took a deep breath at that, mentally bracing herself for what was to come. She sat down in the other free arm chair, pulled out her notebook, then turned to all of them.

“Well then, who wants to start?”

Wilbur was the first to speak up, which did not surprise Puffy, what with his reputation tied to his silver tongue. “Phil is upset with us because we didn’t push the issue on Tommy staying with us, and he doesn’t seem to get that we aren’t in a position to force the matter.”

“He’s my son, he should be staying with his family, not with two relative strangers!” Phil burst out, clearly unable to restrain his opinion on the matter.

“And like I’ve said at least a dozen times by now, Tommy *chose* to go with Sam and Ponk.” Techno looked and sounded done with this entire conversation already. “And need I remind you that Ponk is the server doctor? They’re the best ones to be caring for Tommy right now.”

Phil was already opening his mouth to retort when Puffy held up a hand to stop the elytrian.

“Philza, let me ask you something. Where did Tommy live before he was exiled?”

Phil paused, looking caught off guard by the question. “Well... in his house in the hill. The ‘L’Manberg Embassy’ I think.”

“Did he live with anyone?”

“No, but--”

Puffy held up her hand again. “And where were you living at the time, Philza?”

“In L’Manberg.” His brows were furrowed, clearly confused about the point she was trying to make.

“Why weren’t you living with Tommy?” Puffy prompted. “I’m sure he could have made room for you in his shack. Or you could have given him a room in your two-story house.”

“I’ll tell ya why,” Techno spoke up. “It’s because he was a bit busy helping me build my home and playing babysitter to Wilbur’s ghost. Tommy fell to the wayside, what with his boasts of independence and being a Big Man, so Phil was able to put him out of mind.”

“That’s not fair,” Phil snapped defensively. “You were homeless and Wilbur was-”

“Dead, Phil,” Wilbur cut him off. “I was dead. And Techno is a grown-ass man. Tommy is... is fucking sixteen and he was living *alone* in a dirt shack. And sure, kids his age tend to go off on their own here on Minecraft, but he...”

Wilbur’s breath hitched, his hand covering his mouth. Gently, Puffy reached out, squeezing his knee in comfort.

“Take your time,” she urged. “Just breathe and take your time.”

Wilbur took a deep breath, then managed to compose himself. “Tommy had just spent weeks with me, trapped in a ravine while I mentally spiralled. His home was taken from him once, then blown up by both me *and* Techno, and then he watched you kill me.”

“Yeah, no one would be okay after that,” Techno freely admitted.

“You don’t get to throw stones at me, Technoblade,” Phil hissed harshly, pointing straight at the piglin. “What was it you said? ‘You want to be a hero, Tommy? Then die like one?’”

“Oh, I’m fully aware of how much I screwed up. Yeah I hate the government, but I shouldn’t have taken things as far as I did.”

“Frankly, the amount of times you served us only potatoes was punishment enough for the entire affair,” Wilbur joked weakly, managing to shoot Technoblade a grin.

“Hey, you knew what you were getting into when you put me in charge of Pogtopia’s food supply. I had *just* finished the Great Potato War! It was still fresh, Wilbur!” The Piglin was playfully shouting, smirking as he made his declaration.

Some much needed levity filled the room as the two smiled and snorted. Phil just watched them, still looking conflicted and bitter.

“Anyway, what we’re trying to say is that none of us are good for Tommy,” Techno insisted, his serious demeanour returning. “Bringing him back here with us wouldn’t help him, nor would it help to alleviate the guilt we’re all feeling.”

“Exactly,” Wilbur agreed. “Tommy needs stability, understanding, and a level of care that all three of us have continuously failed to provide him. Sam and Ponk, they can give him that stability.”

“They can, and they have.” Puffy smiled slightly, remembering the tower Sam had built, the carefully curated menu, and the active interest the two adults took in not only Tommy, but Ranboo as well. “He’s *healing* and he’s getting better by the day. He’s surrounded by people who care, isn’t living in a dirt shack, and is, for the first time in a very long time, happy.”

Phil huffed, a noise that reminded Puffy of a petulant toddler. She shook her head at that and sighed.

“Philza, be completely honest with all of us. If Tommy were to come back to the Arctic, what do you think would happen? Who would benefit from that course of action?”

“He’d be back here, with his family, where he belongs.” This time, Phil’s tone had weakened slightly, as if he was struggling to convince even himself of that idea.

“But what would happen? Where would he sleep? Would he feel safe here? Could he bring Ranboo with him?”

“Ranboo?” Phil questioned.

“Oh yeah, the Ender kid.” Techno nodded slightly. “The other child who was living in my barn rent-free? Yeah, I’m pretty sure I mentioned how he kind of became Tommy’s bodyguard.”

“Tommy is rather reliant on Ranboo at the moment,” Puffy admitted. “He was left alone and abandoned for so long that he can’t bear to be apart from Ranboo for very long. This cabin wouldn’t even have room for Tommy, let alone him and Ranboo.”

Wilbur managed a smile at the news about Tommy, even as his face fell at the implications.

“And... Ranboo won’t leave him?” he asked tentatively.

Puffy smiled. “Let me put it this way. The two were apparently trapped in a Bastion together and Tommy laid a claim on Ranboo to protect him. Even since, Ranboo’s been flaunting that claim and embracing being Tommy’s. Leaving him is the last thing on his mind.”

Puffy watched as Techno twitched at the news that Tommy had spent time in a Bastion but managed to otherwise control his reaction. This movement was apparently missed by Phil, a fact that Puffy was silently grateful for.

From his spot, Wilbur piped up. “It’s clear that we aren’t the best choice for Tommy in the current situation, nor, clearly, have we been a good one in the past. Sam, he’s always cared about Tommy. In fact, Ghostbur... I saw him during Tommy’s exile.”

That surprised everyone, including Puffy.

“Wait, Sam went to Logstedshire?” she asked, genuinely stunned.

“Yeah.” Wilbur nodded. “The memory is hazy, but I remember that he came one night. He told Tommy that he was sorry about what L’Manberg did to him, gave him some food and a raincoat, and said that his home was open to Tommy, if he so desired. He made it clear that

the offer was open-ended, so that if Tommy ever changed his mind on staying at Logstedshire, he would be welcome at Sam's."

"Well," Puffy mused aloud. "That visit might explain why he was so comfortable going with Sam, given Sam would have been one of his only visitors. I know Ghostbur was there on-and-off but did either of you two visit Tommy?"

Techno bluntly shook his head and Phil just looked down, shame colouring his face. Puffy nodded at that, giving the latter a blunt look of her own as she held back another disappointed sigh.

"So, do you still think Tommy is better off with you?"

This time Phil didn't respond, instead studying his shoes intently. It was a small concession to the point, one Puffy was willing to take.

"Sometimes, for the good of the people we love, we need to do what is best for them. Even if that means stepping aside and letting someone else take the reins. Tommy is in good hands, Philza. And in time..." she gave him a small, hopeful smile, "perhaps he'll be willing to rebuild his bonds with you."

Tubbo laid out on his back in his pit cell, the morning rays slipping through the bars of the grate above. Despite the early hour, he could hear the pillagers above him rushing around, clearly preparing for something. He vaguely wondered if it was a raid but banished the thought from his mind. It was none of his business what his trainers were up to. Tools do not question the actions of their owners.

As the first bell rang out across the camp, Tubbo sat up with practised ease, awaiting his morning meal. However, instead of having a basket lowered with food, the grate above him was pulled open. Confused, he made his way over to the centre of the pit as the pulley rope to get him out was lowered. He stepped onto the pulley and was removed from his cell, right into the waiting arms of two strong and armed Vindicators.

For a brief moment, Tubbo was worried he had done something to anger his trainers. However, while their grips were firm, there was no harshness to them. One of them even removed the wooden cuffs from his wrists, allowing the goat boy to rotate them and sooth the bruised and scuffed skin. After months of wearing them, Tubbo had resigned himself to scarred wrists, knowing they would be proof that he had served his punishment.

Not long after the wooden cuffs were removed, the camp blacksmith approached with a small, ornate chest in his hand. He pulled the lid open, revealing a set of netherite shackles. They were finely crafted, shimmering with enchantments and had pillager runes carved into the metal. Each shackle had a hinged ring that could be used to connect the set with chains, and a wide collar finished the set.

Now Tubbo understood what was going on. His trainers had decided that he was ready and were preparing him. He'd have been lying if he said he wasn't intimidated by the netherite

bindings, but he knew better than to fight it. So, he closed his eyes and held still, waiting for the inevitable.

His ankles were first, the shackles closing around them before the enchantments took hold. He felt the metal tighten and conform to his leg, meaning that Curse of Binding was one of the enchantments. Once they were in place, a length of chain roughly a foot in length was attached to them, though thankfully it was a normal, unenchanted chain.

His wrists met a similar fate, the shackles covering the marks from the wooden cuffs. Tubbo had to admit they felt more comfortable than the rough wood, and they looked better too. Once more, a short length of chain was attached to them, locked in place and binding him for the time being.

Finally, the collar was introduced. By now, Tubbo's hair had grown quite long, coming down to his shoulders. One of the Vindicators gathered it up so it was out of the way, then the collar clicked shut around his neck. Immediately, the goat hybrid's breath hitched, knowing that there was no going back now.

With the last of his bindings now in place, Tubbo was turned toward the entrance to the camp. He began to walk, as much as his new bindings would allow, to what appeared to be a small caravan preparing to travel. A large wagon was hitched to one of the ravagers, currently holding what looked to be supplies and rations. Tubbo found himself escorted over to this wagon, led over to the supplies being loaded up and pushed to his knees.

Nervousness gripped at the goat boy's stomach, making him grateful he had not been fed this morning. He was definitely being loaded up for transport, meaning that soon, he would see Tommy again. Was he ready for that? Would Tommy even want to see him? What would happen to him if Tommy rejected him? He shook where he knelt, holding himself as best his chains would allow.

After several minutes of kneeling, Tubbo felt a rough hand on his arm. He was pulled to his feet by a Pillager, who escorted him over to a large, open chest. It was a double chest, one that was lined with some sheep's wool. Immediately, Tubbo recognized what it was: his box. He swallowed hard but didn't protest as he was made to step into the chest. He laid down as best he could, curling up so his entire body was in the chest. The moment he was fully packed, the lid closed with a loud thunk, plunging him into darkness as the lock clicked into place.

There was no turning back now. The next time that chest opened, it would be by Tommy. With nothing else to do, Tubbo closed his eyes as his chest was loaded onto the wagon.

Chapter End Notes

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is It's All Good by Theory of a Deadman

Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

A failed intervention, paperwork, and a cutting of ties

Chapter Notes

Here we are again, another new chapter. As usual, shout-out to Author_of_Insanity101, my lovely co-author/beta. She wrote much of this chapter so give her love.

Translations available in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Fundy sat in the L'Manberg Senate room, rubbing his snout as he struggled to fight back a headache. Tensions were high and pretty much everyone who wasn't a native L'Manbergian had returned to their homes. The manhunt for Dream was dead in the water, save for Quackity's manic determination to catch the man. Perhaps it would have been commendable, if the duck hybrid wasn't actively antagonising everyone and anyone that crossed his path. With Puffy no longer present in the city, managing Quackity had largely fallen to Fundy, a task that he had quickly discovered he was unsuited for.

Now, matters were coming to a head with Quackity needing to be stopped; needing help that he was not getting. So, Fundy gathered what few allies remained within the town, calling them all together for an important meeting: an intervention.

HBomb had been the first to arrive, serious even with the cat ears and maid uniform. Fundy cringed at the memory of that disastrous day with the deviant, but he *really* couldn't afford to be picky about his allies. So, he invited the man in, though he did seat the so-called cat maid on the opposite end of the table.

The next one to slip into the room was Niki, who had brought cookies, with a grim look in her eyes. She would have been Fundy's Vice had Coconut2020 won the election, so the two of them were close. Honestly, out of everyone left in L'Manberg, she was the one person Fundy felt like he could truly trust.

The three of them were not kept waiting long for their final member as one Jack Manifold swung the door open and made his way into the last chair set up in the room. The man looked absolutely ragged, all but deflating onto his chair.

“So,” Fundy broke the silence that hung in the air, “there’s no way this is going to go well but it needs to happen. I need to start off by preemptively thanking you for being here and also apologising for whatever happens. “

Niki shook her head. “Don’t apologise for doing what needs to be done. Something needs to happen to reign in Quackity and it's better that it happen now, here, and with us; before he runs his mouth at the wrong person and pays for it, maybe even by way of L’Manberg herself.”

“I’m pretty sure that ship sailed the day he tried to kill fucking Technoblade,” Jack Manifold declared. “Everything basically went to shit after that, especially for Big Q.”

“Honestly, I think eating JSchlatt’s heart is when Quackity began to decline, just far more gradually,” HBomb stated.

Niki whipped her head around to stare at HBomb, shock and disgust written on her face. “He *what?*”

“Oh Prime, I’d forgotten about that...” Fundy felt like he was going to throw up. “Thank you, HBomb, for reminding us of that grotesque fact.”

“No, no.” Niki’s expression had not eased in the slightest. “I’m going to need you to explain that. That’s not a normal thing to just mention off-handedly.”

“It was at Schlatt’s funeral,” Jack Manifold explained, albeit reluctantly. “You weren’t there, but Big Q... he went off the rails. Everyone went a little nuts, had a little too much fun. But Quackity... Prime, the guy had to be drunk, high, or both.”

Fundy groaned, the memories of what happened coming back in full force. “He ate Schlatt’s heart, pissed on his coffin, defaced his memorial portrait, then sang a very horribly off-key song that amounted to him basically saying ‘Fuck you, Schlatt. This bitch is dead’.”

“That’s not exactly normal,” Niki said diplomatically, face scrunched in displeasure.

“Yeah, and frankly, the fact that none of us questioned it back then makes me wonder just how fucked in the head the rest of us are.”

“It hardly matters right now,” Jack interjected, pounding the table with his fist. “What does matter is Quackity’s spiralling and if we don’t step in now, he’s gonna take someone’s canon life, or lose one himself.”

“Right, the game plan is that he is going to come in here soon enough to talk to me about something. This is going to be a surprise to him, one that he is *not* going to like. Frankly, this might even serve to prove his issues right, even only to himself. But, we need to make sure he doesn’t leave, which may include disarming him.”

“Get it through his stupid head that he needs to calm the fuck down, that he can’t continue on like this,” Jack Manifold insisted.

Niki frowned slightly. "What he needs is help, help he is not getting for himself. We need to force the issue."

Fundy waved both statements away. "Trust me, Niki, no one is arguing that he needs help. And this entire intervention is going to be forcing the issue and, Prime willing, get it through that duck's thick skull that he can't keep acting like a fucking maniac."

About that time, the door to the senate room slammed open, making all four of them jump. They turned toward the entrance, spotting a haggard Quackity glaring at them. He was an absolute wreck, his eyes bloodshot with dark bags under his eyes, his clothes rumbled and dirty, the scent of alcohol hanging around him, and a complexion that would make a zombie look like a runway model.

It was immediately obvious to Fundy when Quackity spotted the four of them at the table because his face twisted first to a look of betrayal before flipping to rage.

"Well, well, well..." Quackity let the door slam shut behind him. "I guess it was only a matter of time. Guess you weren't satisfied just leaving me in the lurch, eh? Had to go behind my back and start plotting."

"Quackity," Niki spoke up first, trying to keep her voice calm, "we're worried about you. You're not yourself and we're afraid--"

Quackity barked out a harsh laugh. "Afraid, afraid of what? Me?"

"Honestly, yeah," HBomb admitted. "When was the last time you slept? Or ate? Or took a bath?"

"Frankly, Big Q," Jack Manifold spoke up, "I didn't want to say this before... but you're starting to act like Schla--"

All of a sudden, Quackity had launched himself across the room, grabbing Jack Manifold by the face. His fingers were digging into the man's jaw, their faces mere inches apart.

"What was that?" the duck asked with a manic grin, his eyes wild and unfocused as Jack shuddered in his seat. "I don't think I heard you correctly."

Niki and Fundy quickly got to their feet, rushing to pull Quackity off of Jack. The second they touched him, the duck pulled his axe, aiming it at them. Fundy narrowly managed to get out of the way in time with Niki stumbling back so hard she tripped and fell. Seeing this, Jack shoved Quackity off of him, rising from his seat before summoning his own weapons.

"You motherfucker. Forget acting like him, you're *becoming* Schlatt! For fuck sake, Quackity, we're your friends and you're threatening us like this?!"

"Yeah, what the hell man?" HBomb agreed. "We just wanted to try and talk to you and you're here trying to kill us?!"

"I need to kill you before you kill me! Some friends you claim to be!" Quackity shouted before swinging his axe again, this time at Jack. "Screw you all!"

Fundy moved fast, letting his instincts take over as he slid in between Jack and Big Q. His axe caught Quackity's and they faced off.

"Oh-ho, look who's finally trying to be a man!!" Quackity's grin was unsettling and vicious. "Nice try Fundy, but you're nothing like your old man, or that rancid old crow you call grandpa! You're just some little kid in a crayon suit pretending they mean something!"

The noise Fundy made was one he'd never made before. It was low, animalistic growl akin to one of his feral brethren. He could feel his hackles raising, his stance sliding into something more wild. For a brief moment, Quackity's bravado faltered and Fundy struck. He shoved their axes aside, lunging straight for the duck's throat. He hit his mark, digging his teeth into Quackity's flesh and dragging the man to the ground before shaking him like he was a freshly caught chicken.

Instantly, Quackity went from rage to terror, shrieking as Fundy's fangs dug into the soft flesh of his neck. Already, Fundy could taste blood and he knew that just a bit more pressure would kill his prey. He was tempted to do it. So sorely tempted to bite down and end this. However, a gentle hand on his back stopped him.

Niki's hand.

"Fundy," she whispered. "That's enough."

Slowly, Fundy felt his heartbeat slow down, the rage from before subsiding and allowing rational thought to return. He released his hold on Quackity's throat, the duck dropping to the ground in a limp, shivering pile. The fox then got up, wiped his mouth, then shook his head in disdain.

"Get out," he snarled. "You are no longer welcome in L'Manberg. Not until you get help."

Immediately, Quackity scrambled to his feet, running out of the senate building like there were Phantoms on his trail. Everyone watched him go, knowing instinctively that it would be a long time before any of them saw the duck hybrid again.

George sighed as he dropped his hand from the comm screen. The amount of work that Dream had ignored and let slide was honestly crushing. Even stuck in house arrest, able to dedicate much of his attention towards the admin duties, he had only made a dent in the matter. At the very least, he wasn't alone in his workload.

Sapnap, who was unfortunately useless when it came to paperwork, did his best to help by taking over all the domestic duties. This ended up including physically dragging George outside for fresh air, or to his bed when he tried to pull an all-nighter. As for the bureaucratic nightmare he was facing, aid came in the form of the first and only human visitor to the pair's house arrest prison.

King Eret.

As it turned out, Eret had been attempting to pick up the slack left by Dream's negligence. It had been the reason they'd remained in their palace, mostly holed up as all the drama revolving Tommy took place. Unfortunately, without Admin access, there was little the king could actually accomplish, but at least they'd tried. And they were still trying. Frankly, their sorting of items by their urgency and importance was the most helpful thing by miles as it allowed George to figure out what to prioritise.

"Dammit, Dream..." George cursed under his breath. "The server needs four new updates *and* a complete world refresh? Just how much data have you been keeping from us in your bid for control?"

Sapnap, who had just brought in a basket of carrots from the little farm plot, groaned at the statement, knowing just as well as George how bad that news was.

"Set the refresh for the middle of the night," Eret told him from across the table, jotting down some notes on a notebook they were using to help organise. "Everyone will sleep through it and it won't disrupt anyone's routine. I recommend 4 am. Everyone's asleep by then."

"Right." George inputted the refresh time, rubbing his eyes as he confirmed the time. "Alright. What's next on the list?"

"Re-issuing a communicator for Tommy." Eret slid the acquisition form across the table. "Sam put it in with me a while back, but I haven't had the authority to order him a new one. Not to mention the paperwork to explain what happened to his old one."

George felt the complicated ball of emotions that he had about Tommy rising to the surface of his thoughts. Grief was the most prevalent feeling, mixing with his current anger at Dream's inaction, whether it be negligence or deliberate maliciousness. Still, George knew that he couldn't allow his emotions to overcome him now, not when there was ever-more to do. There was a perfectly good server refresh coming up that he would have to be awake for that would be perfect for stewing in his feelings.

Reaching back out to the comm, George pulled up the admin menu, reading over the options until spying the tab labelled as "Communications." Double-tapping the option, a new window loaded, showing the statuses of the comms of all the players of the server. Immediately, he was hit with an alert about an offline communicator. With a sigh, he clicked it, which showed him Tommy's was offline.

"So it's not just taken, but completely offline. Fuck." He attempted to reactivate it, but was met with an error message, which only made him groan. "And it can't be reactivated, so that means it's broken."

Really not wanting to deal with this, he switched to his private messages.

[You whispered to /K: Hey XD, Tommy's communicator's busted. If it's still around, can you fix it for me?]

He sent off the message, then turned his attention back to the Communications tab. He refreshed the page and let out a sigh of relief when Tommy's communicator showed as

online. With a quick swipe of his finger, George reactivated the communicator, connecting it back to the server's VC and PM systems.

[You whispered to /K: Thank you.]

[/K.:T/U!;L::L·K T J||J=: J'J||T T/U -J::||J=: -L·J:-L:]

Just as George was about to close the tab and move on to the next task, he noticed another alert coming up. This one was about a communicator that had been taken from its owner, flagged as urgent due to the location: a piglin Bastion.

“Oh jeez...” He rubbed his face.

“What is it?” Eret questioned, coming over to look at what was going on.

“Someone got careless in a Bastion and lost their comm. It's flagged on the server as urgent.”

“It was likely one of the members of the Manhunt. There haven't been any death messages since Punz bled to death, so there may be a player trapped in the Bastion.” Eret reached over, tapping on the alert. “Whose communicator is sending the distress signal?”

The moment the name came up, George felt his blood run cold.

“Oh fuck...” He covered his mouth. “Dream...”

Eret double checked the coordinates George had found in the distress signal from Dream, seeing that it led to the Bastion just on the edge of the chaotic nether hub. They didn't really want to disturb the piglins, especially if Dream had somehow gotten them on his side. However, the lack of information about the most dangerous man on the server made it clear they had to act.

The coords matched with the building in front of them and so Eret sighed and pushed their sunglasses back up their nose; the Nether was far too bright for their sensitive eyes.

As a Brine, Eret knew that they held special privileges in terms of mobs, a slight level of respect. That rarely extended to the piglins, especially the brutes. However, this time, as they approached the looming blackstone structure, they were surprised by how little activity their arrival was stirring up. The only piglins in sight barely twitched at them, not even going so far as to point their weapons at them. They had a gut feeling it wasn't because of the golden crown they were wearing.

The lack of immediate aggression did lift their spirit, as it suggested that the piglins had not sided with Dream, which made this entire endeavour noticeably safer. Still, Eret couldn't afford to be careless. Piglins were always a threat, even when they were relaxed.

“I am King Eret of the Dream SMP!” they called out, grateful to have taken lessons in Piglin. **“I have come to speak with your leader about a Player who may be within your Bastion!”**

The moment they mentioned a player, the piglins were on the offensive. Weapons were drawn and angry snorts filled the air. Eret felt on the verge of panic, wondering what he could say or do to get them to calm down. If they were on Dream's side, the King would be slaughtered, but if they were against the former admin...

Their musings were cut off when a scarred piglin wielding a netherite axe came marching up to them. This piglin was clearly a brute, given their black robes and large size, and seemed to size Eret up.

“You are Player King?” The piglin snorted in a way that seemed to represent amusement.
“You are weak. Scrawny. Better servant than King.”

Realising what this was, Eret removed their glasses, meeting the pigling with the full force of their stare. Immediately, all of the gathered piglins began to cower, which included the brute. It shielded its face from their gaze, as if attempting to ward off the power that lay in the King's pupiless eyes.

“Still think I am weak?” Eret stood still for only a minute more before pulling their glasses back on. **“Now, take me to your leader. I will speak with them about the Player in your Bastion.”**

The piglins snorted within themselves before one of them, the scarred brute with the axe, tentatively stepped forward.

“Player King... why do you seek the Player? Are they friend?”

Eret couldn't contain the absolute disgust they felt at the very idea. Behind their glasses, their eyes began to glow from the power created from their rage. Before they could properly stop themselves, they were growling in a tongue they hadn't used in a *very* long time.

[illegible]

Sensing their anger, and likely remembering the horror stories of Eret's infamous ancestor, the brute was quick to bow in apology. Eret took a deep breath, the glow behind their eyes fading as they reigned themselves in. Once they were back in control, they faced the piglin again.

“No, I am not their friend. They hurt a child and manipulated me into turning against my friends. I know I have much to answer for, but so does he, and if you are harbouring him so he can escape his justly deserved punishment...”

“No!” The brute eyed them warily, as if terrified that Eret would strike them down for daring to interrupt the King. **“No. The green monster is no ally of ours. Come, I will show you.”**

Moving to the side, the brute allowed Eret to come into the Bastion. Still weary, the brine fell into step behind their escort, following them through the blackstone gate. They were then led

down a winding path through the Bastion, moving through an almost dizzying number of passages. Finally Eret found himself standing in what looked to be an open quarry. Piglins were actively mining for more blackstone and gold, but that wasn't what caught the king's eye.

No, that would be the blistered, scrawny, chained figure that was dragging a massive minecart full of rocks. The figure was clad only in a ragged cloth for modesty, but the ratty blonde hair and almost glowing green eyes made it clear who it was.

"Dream..." Eret whispered, stunned by the dramatic change in the former admin.

The second those words left their lips, Dream froze. He turned toward the king and his expression became one of relief and desperation.

"Eret..." he croaked. "Eret! Help me! Ple-"

The moment Dream started speaking, the nearby piglins swarmed him. Terrifying whips were brought out, cracking as they were brought down on the man. Dream crumbled to the ground, cowering as he was beaten while continuing to cry out for Eret. The Brine just watched, unsure of what to make of this chilling scene.

"Chattel be silent!" bellowed the brute before turning its attention back to Eret. **"This is Chattel. It is not broken yet. Does not show remorse or guilt for what it has done. It is the lowest of the Bastion, working the worst jobs to repent."**

Eret continued to watch Dream getting beaten, seeing the once powerful admin reduced to a shaking mess. After what felt like hours, but what was likely only a few minutes, the beating stopped and the piglins stepped away from Dream. One of them produced a weak healing potion, splashing it over the downed man. Only then did the former admin begin to move again. The scarred brute that had escorted Eret in marched over to the man, grabbing him by the hair before dragging him over to where Eret was.

"Chattel bow to Brine King!" it ordered, shoving Dream to his knees.

Immediately, Dream did what he was told, though his eyes locked with Eret's briefly. They could see the flicker of hope in them, the silent prayers to be freed. If he hadn't just been beaten for speaking, there was a good chance the man would still be crying and begging.

Normally, Eret was not a cruel being. Normally, they did their best to hold back the darker impulses that came with their heritage. Normally, the target of their rage was not an abuser and manipulator. Normally, they would try harder to fight them.

This was hardly a normal circumstance.

"Are you sorry?" They questioned, glaring down at Dream from behind their glasses. "Do you regret what you've done?"

Dream stilled for a heartbeat, an almost unnoticeable pause. Then, he started babbling. Words practically vomited out of his mouth, so fast it was difficult to understand him.

“Yes, yes, I regret it! I hurt him and I shouldn't have. I'm a monster, a horrible person, whatever you want to call me! Please, I'll do anything. Lock me up, banish me, fuck, even execute me! Just get me out of here, please!”

Eret sucked in a breath, startled by the intensity but not fooled for a second. Something behind Dream's eyes was still hollow, still missing that spark of humanity. Dream hadn't even managed to say Tommy's name, to even truly acknowledge the one he hurt the most. Besides, Eret knew that people would say anything to end their suffering.

Shaking their head, Eret took a step backward from Dream, forcing themselves to ignore the flash of fear that appeared on Dream's face.

“Wait!” Dream cried, reaching out for Eret. Immediately, the scarred piglin brought the Hilt of their axe down on the man's head. He screamed, trying to cling to the hem of the King's robe. “Eret, please! You can't leave me here!”

“No, I can and will. It is not my place to interfere in this matter.”

With a disgusted sneer, Eret kicked Dream away, feeling a rush of satisfaction when his boot connected with the man's nose. Dream recoiled into a ball, hands clasped over his face. Those hands were not enough to cover up the look of hatred that Dream shot Eret. The king ignored it, their attention turning to the piglins.

“When you took your prisoner, did he have a device with him? A metal box that made noise?”

The brute paused for a second, a flicker of confusion crossing its snout. Then, recognition dawned. It snorted, pointing to one of the smaller piglins.

“Go get chattel's things for Brine King.”

The piglin immediately ran off, disappearing into the Bastion. Dream just continued to glare at Eret, though he flinched when the Brute moved to hit him again.

“What are you doing?” Dream let out, confusion and rage in his tone. That just got him actually smacked this time.

“Chattel be silent!” the Brute demanded.

“Yeah, chattel be silent,” Eret sneered.

Dream fell silent, hatred twisting his face into a hideous snarl. About that time, the piglin returned, carrying an old chest with a thick lock on the hinge, likely to prevent the contents from being stolen. With reverence, the piglin offered the chest to Eret, the King taking it with a nod of thanks.

“Is this everything?” they asked, addressing the Brute.

“Yes. Everything chattel had on it when it was taken.”

“Good.”

Without hesitation, Eret chucked the chest into a nearby lava pit. Everything burned with a satisfying sizzle, which was punctuated by a scream from Dream. The king dusted their hands off, turning to the chained man with a disgusted snarl.

“When I return to the Overworld, I’m going to have George register you as permanently deceased. Your communicator will not be reissued and your player data will be deleted. You will be nothing more than an entity, no better than a mob.”

The anger on Dream’s face melted into an expression of dawning horror. Having his data removed means he no longer had the pleasure of respawn mechanics, meaning he was basically in Hardcore. If he died, he was gone for good, erased from existence without so much as a death message.

“No...” he whimpered. “No, please! You can’t! **YOU CAN’T DO THIS!!**”

Eret looked at the form of a man who they once called a friend, face blank, and spoke. “The problem with that, Dream, is who will stop us? There isn’t a single person on the server who doesn’t know what you’ve done. No one is on your side anymore. Not me, not Sapnap, not George.”

“You’re lying!” The desperate gleam in Dream’s eye was almost entertaining. “This is *my* SMP! MINE!! You can’t just erase me!”

Eret snorted, turning on their heels with a flick of their cape. “Watch me. **Brute... I’ll leave this filth in your capable hands.**”

With their piece said, Eret turned on their heel and began to march back out of the bastion and towards their home. Behind them, Dream’s anguished screams and the crack of a whip filled the air.

A fitting punishment for a truly deplorable man.

Chapter End Notes

Translations:

Section Two: [xd whispered to you: anything for you, george.]

Section Three: The day that worthless sack of shit decided to torture a child, he stopped being my friend... I would sooner give myself over to be consumed by the skulk before ever calling that monster my friend.

Comments and kudos are, as always, appreciated, even if I don't respond to comments.

Song recommendation this time is Pink Pony Club by Chappell Roan

End Notes

Feel free to leave a kudos, comment, or critique, I won't bite.

I'm on Tumblr at elurosathena. Feel free to drop by if you want.

I'm on Discord at ElurosAthena#3980. I will respond, I'm just really awkward so be warned.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!